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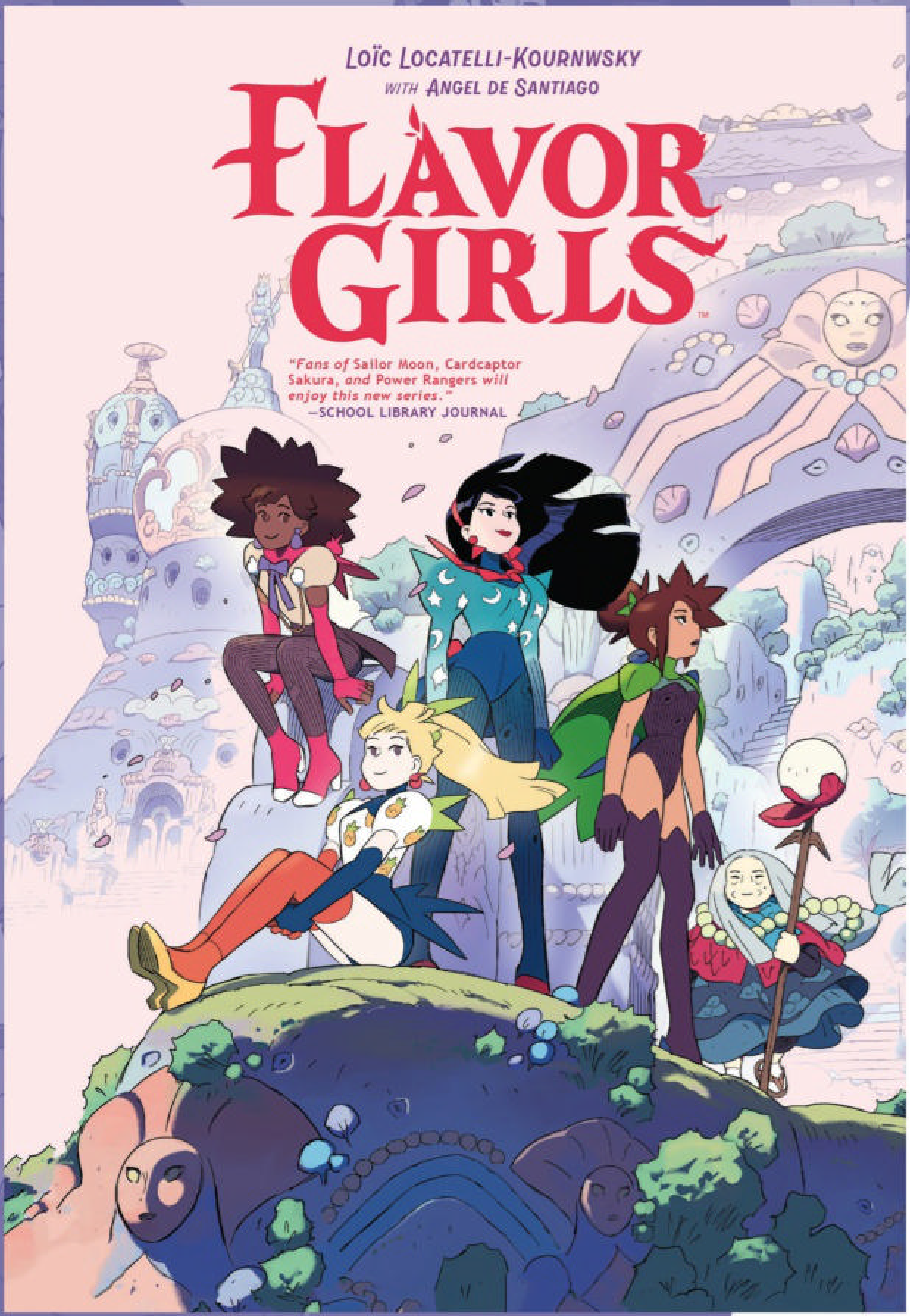
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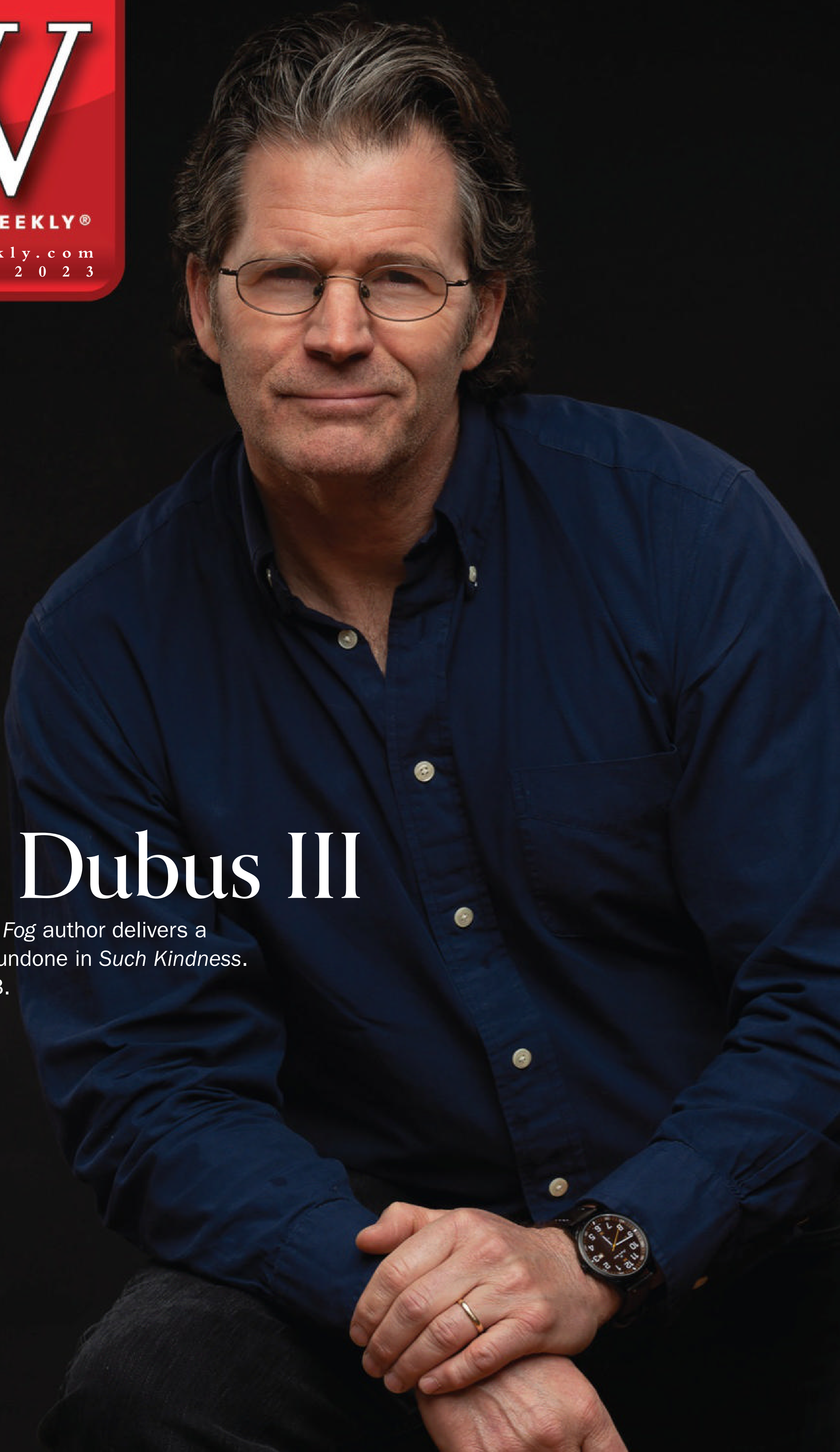

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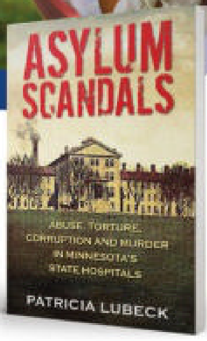
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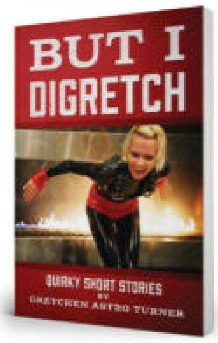
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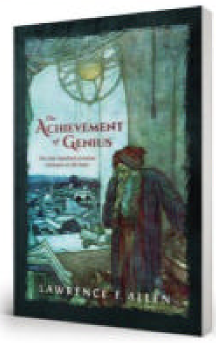
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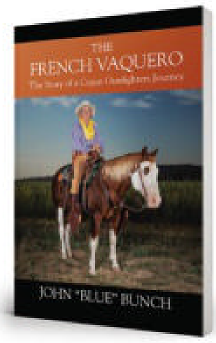
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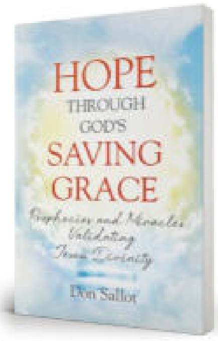
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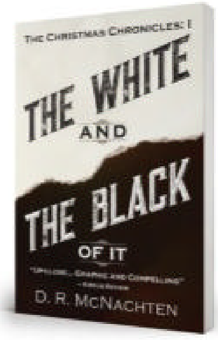
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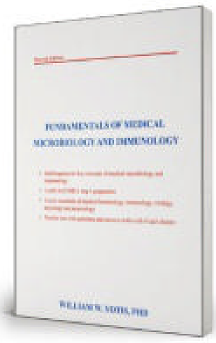
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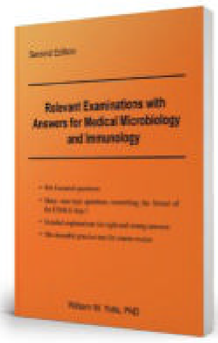
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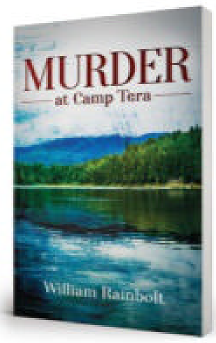
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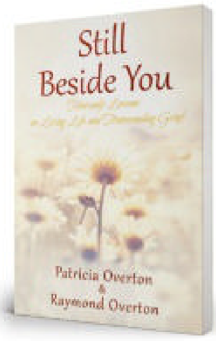
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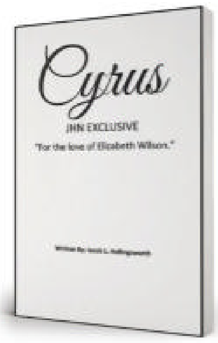
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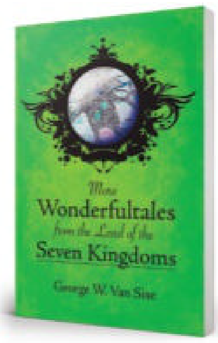
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### 7 February Ends with Print Sales Up

Print unit sales rose 0.6% in the week ended February 25, over the similar week last year, driven by a 12.2% gain in adult fiction sales.

### 9 Booksellers Gather in Seattle

More than 900 booksellers attended the ABA's Winter Institute in the Emerald City, which wrapped up February 23. We've got photos.

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YA novelist Laurie Devore sells her adult debut to Avon, Del Rey buys a new novel and two backlist titles from Karen Lord, and more.

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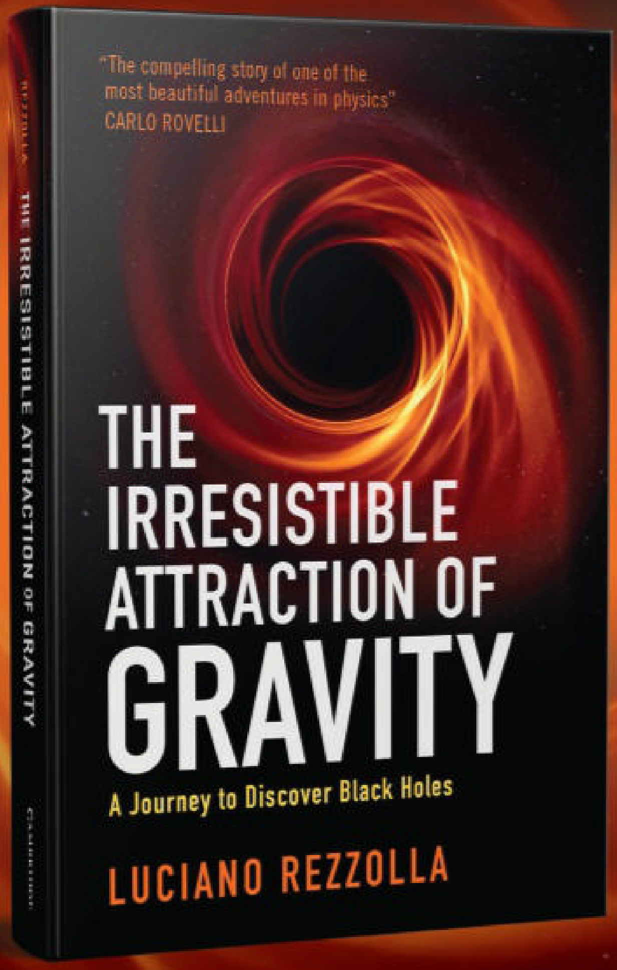
THE IRRESISTIBLE ATTRACTION OF GRAVITY

A Journey to Discover Black Holes

LUCIANO REZZOLLA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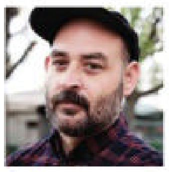

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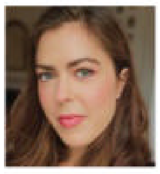

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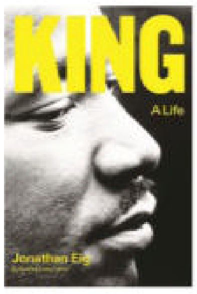

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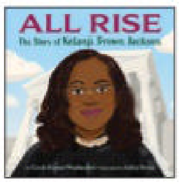

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# The Week in **Publishing**

**Small Press Distribution** launched a GoFundMe campaign to raise $100,000 to help it implement a new operating model, which features partnership agreements with the Ingram Content Group and Publishers Storage and Shipping, as well as the closing of its own Berkeley, Calif., warehouse.

**Gibbs Smith** will launch 7 Cats Press this fall. The children's book imprint will release 16 titles annually, and its debut list will feature 12 board books.

**Lawrence Schimel**, an editor, author, and translator, has been named senior editor at NorthSouth Books. He will focus on developing the company's Spanish-language publishing efforts.

**Haymarket Books and Kaepernick Publishing** have joined together to crash *Our History Has Always Been Contraband: In Defense of Black Studies*, a compilation of essays by Black scholars and other thinkers. The book is a response to education bans that target the teaching of African American history.

## Online & On-Air

### A Career Considered

Recently retired senior editor Calvin Reid discusses covering comics and graphic novels for more than three decades.
**publishersweekly.com/reid**

### The Week Ahead

Penguin Random House has once again broken Random House and Crown into two publishing groups—a move it says is intended to revive competition among its imprints. Senior writer Andrew Albanese explains.
**publishersweekly.com/restructuring**

### More to Come

The hosts recap the annual ComicsPRO retailers conference and its return as an in-person event.
**publishersweekly.com/comicspro**

### Children's Bookshelf

Author-illustrator Amy Schwartz, creator of more than 60 books for young readers, died suddenly on February 26 at her home in Brooklyn. She was 68.
**publishersweekly.com/schwartz**

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# Back to the Future

### A PRH reorg divides the Random House Publishing Group into separate Random House and Crown units, albeit in different forms than they had in 2017

The reorganization of Penguin Random House US unveiled last week features the creation of a fourth adult publishing group, as well as the formation of an executive leadership team that will oversee the U.S. business with interim global CEO Nihar Malaviya. As *PW* previously reported, the new structure does not include a replacement for Madeline McIntosh as PRH US CEO.

*David Drake*

The most dramatic change is splitting the Random House Publishing Group back into two groups: the Crown Publishing Group as well as the standalone RHPG. Sanyu Dillon, previously chief marketing officer for PRH, has been named president of RHPG, and David Drake has been promoted to president of CPG. Both will report to Malaviya.

The addition of a new adult publishing group is intended to meet one of PRH's priorities for a restructuring: to revive competition among its imprints while providing more touchpoints for agents to meet editors. In announcing the changes to PRH staff, Malaviya wrote, “Books and the people who make them are at the heart of what we do. Our editors' ability to aggressively pursue the works they are most passionate about, and the autonomy and independence of our divisions and imprints, is what drives our business and ensures our success.”

PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE
ADULT PUBLISHING GROUPS

**Crown Publishing Group**
David Drake, president

**Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group**
Maya Mavjee, president and publisher

**Penguin Publishing Group**
Allison Dobson, president

**Random House Publishing Group**
Sanyu Dillon, president

Random House and Crown had long operated as separate publishing groups until they were combined in late 2017 under the direction of Gina Centrello, who retired as president and publisher of the united group in January. Forming separate Random House and Crown publishing groups does not mean the divisions are returning to their prior incarnations, however. The major imprints within the new RHPG are Ballantine Bantam Dell and Delacorte, Convergent, Dial Press, Harmony and Rodale, Hogarth, Modern Library, One World, Random House Worlds, and WaterBrook & Multnomah. Of those, Convergent, Harmony and Rodale, Hogarth, and Waterbrook & Multnomah had originally been part of Crown but had moved under the RHPG umbrella over the years. The major imprints making up the new CPG are Crown, Clarkson Potter, Currency, and Ten Speed Press. Dillon and Drake are currently deciding where a number of smaller imprints will end up—a process expected to take a few weeks.

*Sanyu Dillion*

In addition to the creation of a new adult publishing group, Jeff Abraham, head of Penguin Random House Publisher Services, has been promoted to president of publishing operations, technology, and services. In his expanded role, Abraham will lead IT, publishing operations, and PRH Labs, in addition to his continued oversight of PRHPS.

Abraham is reporting to Malaviya, as are the following division heads, all of whom run publishing groups: Amanda D'Acierno, president and publisher of Penguin Random House Audio Publishing Group; Allison Dobson, president of Penguin Publishing Group; Jen Loja, president of Penguin Young Readers; Barbara Marcus, president and publisher of Random House Children's Books; and Maya Mavjee, president and publisher of Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Along with the division heads, other Malaviya direct reports include Annette Danek, global executive v-p and chief supply chain officer; Paige McInerney, executive v-p and director of human resources at PRH US; Kimberly Ayers Shariff, executive v-p of strategy for diversity, equity and inclusion at PRH US; and Nina von Moltke, president and director of strategic development at PRH US.

Still another new Malaviya report is Jaci Updike, who has been promoted to president of sales and marketing for the company. Updike herself has gained some new reports, including Erica Curtis, who replaces Dillon as senior v-p of consumer marketing. In addition, John Bohman, senior v-p of sales and customer operations, will now report to Updike. By bringing the sales and consumer marketing departments together, Malaviya wrote, “our goal is to become even more reader-focused and market-facing.”

Referring to the leadership group, Malaviya told employees, “These colleagues make up an incredibly talented, experienced team of leaders with diverse backgrounds and skill sets. To position ourselves for future growth, I have chosen to elevate this executive team to lead the U.S. business and work directly with me—and with all of you—as we write our next chapter together.”

Malaviya also noted that while overseeing PRH US, the heads of the global support areas and the CEOs of each of PRH’s international divisions who sit on the global executive committee will continue to report to him.

**—Jim Milliot**

# Raccah Does It Her Way

Sourcebooks had another record year in 2022, increasing its unit sales of print books by 12.5 million over 2021 at outlets that report to NPD BookScan, making it not only one of the fastest-growing publishers in the U.S. last year but also the eighth-largest. Dominique Raccah, who started the company in 1987, attributed part of Sourcebooks’ success to its use of data—one reason she likes to cite BookScan when discussing the company’s progress.

*Dominique Raccah*

“Using BookScan helps me to understand strategically what we are looking for, and strategy plays a significate role in our planning,” she said. “We have set up a system where we can be prepared for whatever happens in the marketplace.”

Some other key data points show that Sourcebooks was the fourth-largest romance publisher in 2022, with a 14% market share, and that overall adult fiction sales soared 86% over 2021. “We dominate BookTok tables,” Raccah said. “If it’s not Colleen Hoover, it’s us.”

All of Sourcebooks’ four adult fiction book imprints

## The Weekly Scorecard

# February Ends with Small Gain in Print Sales

A 12.2% increase in sales in the adult fiction category was enough to lift total unit sales of print books by 0.6% in the week ended Feb. 25, 2023, over the comparable week in 2022, at outlets that report to NPD BookScan. The gain in adult fiction was driven by solid performances by a number of new titles. Lucy Score’s *Things We Hide from the Light* sold nearly 64,000 copies, which put it in first place on the category list. *The Adventure Zone* by Clint McElroy was in sixth place, selling about 20,000 copies in its first week. In between Score and McElroy were four Colleen Hoover titles, which sold a combined total of about 125,000 copies. Adult fiction was the only category to post a sales increase over last year, but for the second week in a row, the decline in sales in adult nonfiction was small, with units down 1.9%. Three new releases helped to limit the decline, including *Young Forever* by Mark Hyman, which sold more than 38,000 copies, putting it in the category’s top spot. Beth Moore’s memoir *All My Knotted-Up Life* was in fourth place, selling more than 14,000 copies, and *Two Week’s Notice* by Amy Porterfield was in sixth place, selling just under 12,000 copies. Sales fell 4% in juvenile fiction, though two new titles made the category’s top 10 list: *Investigators* by John Patrick Green just edged out *Daddy Hugs* for seventh place on the list, with both selling more than 12,000 copies.

TOTAL SALES OF PRINT BOOKS (IN THOUSANDS)

| | FEB. 26, 2022 | FEB. 25, 2023 | CHGE WEEK | CHGE YTD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 13,566 | 13,654 | 0.6% | -1.6% |

UNIT SALES OF PRINT BOOKS BY CATEGORY (IN THOUSANDS)

| | FEB. 26, 2022 | FEB. 25, 2023 | CHGE WEEK | CHGE YTD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adult Nonfiction | 5,104 | 5,007 | -1.9% | -4.2% |
| Adult Fiction | 3,171 | 3,558 | 12.2% | 6.1% |
| Juvenile Nonfiction | 1,145 | 1,101 | -3.8% | -8.1% |
| Juvenile Fiction | 3,351 | 3,218 | -4.0% | -4.8% |
| Young Adult Fiction | 525 | 491 | -6.5% | 3.0% |
| Young Adult Nonfiction | 76 | 70 | -7.4% | -11.5% |

UNIT SALES OF PRINT BOOKS BY FORMAT (IN THOUSANDS)

| | FEB. 26, 2022 | FEB. 25, 2023 | CHGE WEEK | CHGE YTD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hardcover | 3,774 | 3,583 | -5.0% | -4.7% |
| Trade Paperback | 7,809 | 8,165 | 4.6% | -0.1% |
| Mass Market Paperback | 653 | 490 | -25.0% | -19.5% |
| Board Books | 911 | 975 | 7.0% | 4.5% |

SOURCE: NPD BOOKSCAN AND PUBLISHERS WEEKLY. NPD’S U.S. CONSUMER MARKET PANEL COVERS APPROXIMATELY 80% OF THE PRINT BOOK MARKET AND CONTINUES TO GROW.

had big sales increases, led by Bloom Books, the imprint started with E.L. James in 2021 with a business model geared toward entrepreneurial authors. The imprint has quickly ramped up its output, publishing 55 titles last year and with plans to release 60 books this year. Bloom's approach to romance, Raccah said, "fits the times very, very well." (Bloom's most recent release, Lucy Score's *Things We Hide from the Light*, sold almost 64,000 copies in its first week, making it the #1 book for the week ended February 25.)

As well as Sourcebooks is doing in adult fiction, the category was far from the only sales driver last year, with all Sourcebooks categories posting gains. In fact, the young adult/juvenile category accounted for 56% of unit sales. Perhaps Sourcebooks' hottest property at the moment is Hard to Catch, a picture book, board book, and activity book series, which has sold about 14 million copies since its first titles were published in 2016. The company is very bullish about the prospects for the first Hard to Catch graphic novels, which are set to be released in September.

Sourcebooks' YA category "is absolutely on fire," Raccah said, up 71% for the year to date. The category is made up of a number of different parts—Midnight Reads is its thriller program, which does well in the indie bookseller channel. As part of its YA fantasy lineup, Sourcebooks will publish debut author Lily Meade's *Shadow Sister* in June, following a great reaction to Meade's appearance at Winter Institute. A third YA subcategory is contemporary titles, and more books on social justice and LBGTQ issues are forthcoming.

Raccah speculated that being based in Naperville, Ill.—"outside of the gentlemen's business that had been publishing"—may be the reason Sourcebooks' publishing program has long been more reflective of the demographic makeup of the country than those of its counterparts in New York. The company is committed, she added, to diversifying the entire publishing ecosystem, including its bookselling and author ranks, and has developed numerous programs to that end, including its recently announced BIPOC educational training program.

As much as Raccah loves data, she is quick to acknowledge that a large part of Sourcebooks' recent success has come from the caliber of the company's new hires, many of whom previously held jobs at Big Five publishers. "I think we have representatives from all the big houses," Raccah said. Two of the three women on the Zoom call with Raccah (80% of Sourcebooks' leadership team are women) fall into that category: Molly Waxman, executive director of marketing, adult fiction, had worked at HarperCollins, and Paula Amendolara, senior v-p of sales, was previously at S&S.

Waxman said Sourcebooks has a completely different operating philosophy than the Big Five—one that embraces input from all employees and doesn't depend on just a few leaders. That strategy allows for new ideas to come in from all areas, including from younger staff. And while Sourcebooks now has more than 200 employees, "that's not so many minds you have to change in order to try something new," Waxman added.

Amendolara said employees fully believe in Sourcebooks' mission statement that "books change lives," which gives them the motivation to do the best they can for the company's books and authors. She also appreciates that the company is "very transparent," in large part because of Raccah's biweekly updates on the company and the industry.

Sourcebooks' willingness to innovate has resulted in so many projects bubbling up in different departments that Raccah said there are many experiments she isn't even aware of. When asked if that means she is loosening her control over the company, all three women chuckled. "I do pay very close attention," Raccah admitted. "I care a lot."

And Raccah's management style has changed. The pandemic made it employers' responsibility to make work better, she said. To that end, she has fully embraced a hybrid model, with employees permitted to work in many different locations. "I think a return to the office daily is a nonstarter," she noted. She believes Sourcebooks and other companies in the industry are in the process of developing a new style of publishing.

Despite concerns from some industry members about the prospects for the business in 2023, Raccah said she believes it is a great time to be in publishing. She points to the large number of people who have become new readers, many of them women ages 18–35, who are buying books not only for themselves but for their children as well. "We are watching another generation discover reading and discover new authors," she said. "You'd been crazy not to be excited."

**—Jim Milliot**

## Call for Information

**Feature: LGBTQ Voices in Focus**
**Deadline:** Mar. 10 **Issue:** May 1
**Needed:** information on forthcoming adult and children's books by LGBTQ authors. Please make sure your pitch indicates why each author and book are appropriate for this feature. Pub dates: May–Oct. 2023. New titles only, please; no reprints. Submission deadline: March 10. Visit publishersweekly.com/LGBTQMay23 to submit your titles.

# Getting Together in Seattle

More than 900 booksellers and a total of 1,600 people attended the American Booksellers Association's Winter Institute in Seattle, February 20–23. It was the first in-person Winter Institute since 2020, and the buzzy event offered a chance for the ABA's membership to network and discuss how to collectively address challenges such as inflation, rising wages, and Amazon, as well as emphasizing more progressive concerns, such as how to build community, improve employees' health and wellness, and make bookselling more diverse and inclusive.

*From l.: ABA's Kim Hooyboer, Loyalty's Hannah Oliver Depp, Baldwin & Co.'s DJ Johnson, and* The Wake Up *author Michelle MiJung Kim.*

PHOTOS: ED NAWOTKA AND NATHALIE OP DE BEECK

*From l.: HarperCollins author Jason June, Chronicle trade sales rep Jamil Zaidi, Levine Querido author Keah Brown, and Levine Querido founder Arthur A. Levine.*

*From l.: Third Place Books' Robert Sindelar, ABA's Courtney Wallace, Record Store Day's Carrie Colliton, and author-musician Ani DiFranco.*

*From l.: Emily Cook of Cursor, Michael Reynolds of Europa Editions, and Alana Wilcox of Coach House Books enjoyed the opening night party hosted by Elliott Bay Book Company.*

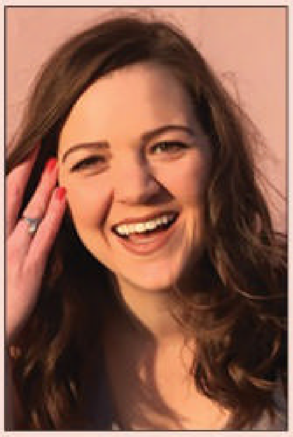
*Attendees who identify as BIPOC booksellers posed for a photo.*

*The galley room offered more than 370 prepublication books.*

# DEALS

## DEAL OF THE WEEK

### Devore's 'Villain' Rocks Avon


Devore

At Avon, **Rachel Kahan** preempted world English rights to **Laurie Devore**'s adult debut, *The Villain Edit*, for six figures. Devore was represented by **Sarah Landis** at Sterling Lord Literistic, who said the book was pitched as "*The Bachelor* by way of *Fleabag*." It follows "a failing author who goes on a reality TV dating show to revive her career and quickly finds herself cast as the villain in the love story." Devore is an established YA novelist whose books include *How to Break a Boy* and *A Better Bad Idea*.

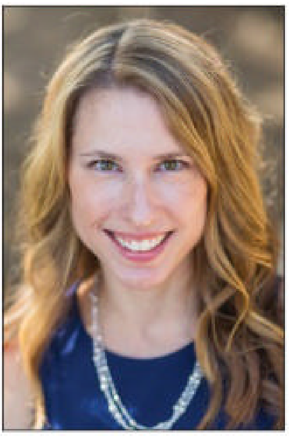
### Bowers's 'Dealer' Sells to Gallery

©DEBORAH LOPEZ

Bowers

Gallery Books' **Pamela Cannon** preempted world rights to actor **Nadia Bowers**'s memoir *Dear Dealer*. The book is expanded from a piece of the same name that Bowers wrote for *This American Life*. Gallery said the memoir is told through a blend of narrative and letters to "the unknown drug dealer Bowers holds responsible for the fentanyl overdose death of her sister, a beloved clinical social worker." Bowers has starred in several Broadway plays and guest starred on various TV shows, including *Law & Order*, *NCIS*, and *The Strain*. The book is slated for spring 2025. Bowers was represented by **Erin Hosier** at Dunow, Carlson & Lerner.

### Strawser Does Double with Lake Union


©CORRIE SCHAFFELD

Strawser

In a two-book, world rights agreement, **Jessica Strawser** (*A Million Reasons Why*) sold *The Last Caretaker* to **Alicia Clancy** at Amazon's Lake Union Publishing. The publisher said the novel follows "a woman who accepts a residential caretaker job on a nature reserve, only to discover her new home is part of an underground network that helps domestic violence victims escape." **Barbara Poelle** at the Irene Goodman Literary Agency brokered the agreement for Strawser, and *The Last Caretaker* is slated for November.

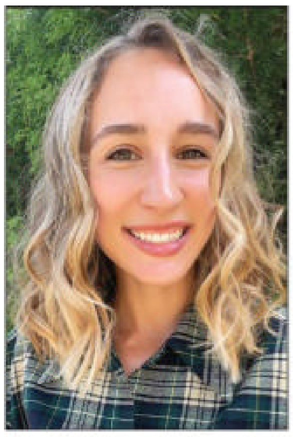
### Pantheon Embraces Landau's 'Mother'

©DANIEL SAHLBERG

Landau

**Alexis Landau** (*The Empire of the Senses*) sold North American rights to *The Mother of All Things* to **Deborah Garrison** at Pantheon Books. The publisher said the spring 2024–slated novel is "a page-turner about female rage, grief, and creativity" that follows a mother who "immerses herself in ancient Greco-Roman female mystery rites while on a summer journey with her family." **Alice Tasman** at the Jean V. Naggar Agency represented Landau.

### Griffin Nabs BookTokker's 'Last Shot'


Cayouette

**Eileen Rothschild** at St. Martin's Griffin preempted *One Last Shot* by **Betty Cayouette**, creator of the Betty's Book List TikTok account, in a two-book, North American rights deal. **Lauren Spieller** brokered the deal for Cayouette while at TriadaUS Literary Agency, but she's since moved to Folio Literary Management. The book, per Griffin, is a second-chance romance that follows two friends who, after making a marriage pact, have a falling-out. A decade later, "she has realized her dreams by becoming one of the most recognized models in the world, and he's a successful photographer. They have one last shot at love while working together on Italy's beautiful Cinque Terre." *One Last Shot* is set for summer 2024.

### Lord Takes Her 'World' to Del Rey

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Lord

Del Rey Books' **Tricia Narwani** bought North American rights to **Karen Lord**'s *The Blue, Beautiful World*. The novel was sold along with reprint rights to two of the Barbadian author's previous titles, *Redemption in Indigo* and *Unraveling*. Del Rey described the latter two as "a pair of loosely linked fantasy novels inspired by the folklore of the Caribbean." *The Blue, Beautiful World* is scheduled for August, and the publisher called it "a wondrous science fiction epic about a group of gifted visionaries who race to imagine a new future when first contact transforms the earth." **Sally Harding** at the Cooke-McDermid Literary Agency brokered the agreement.

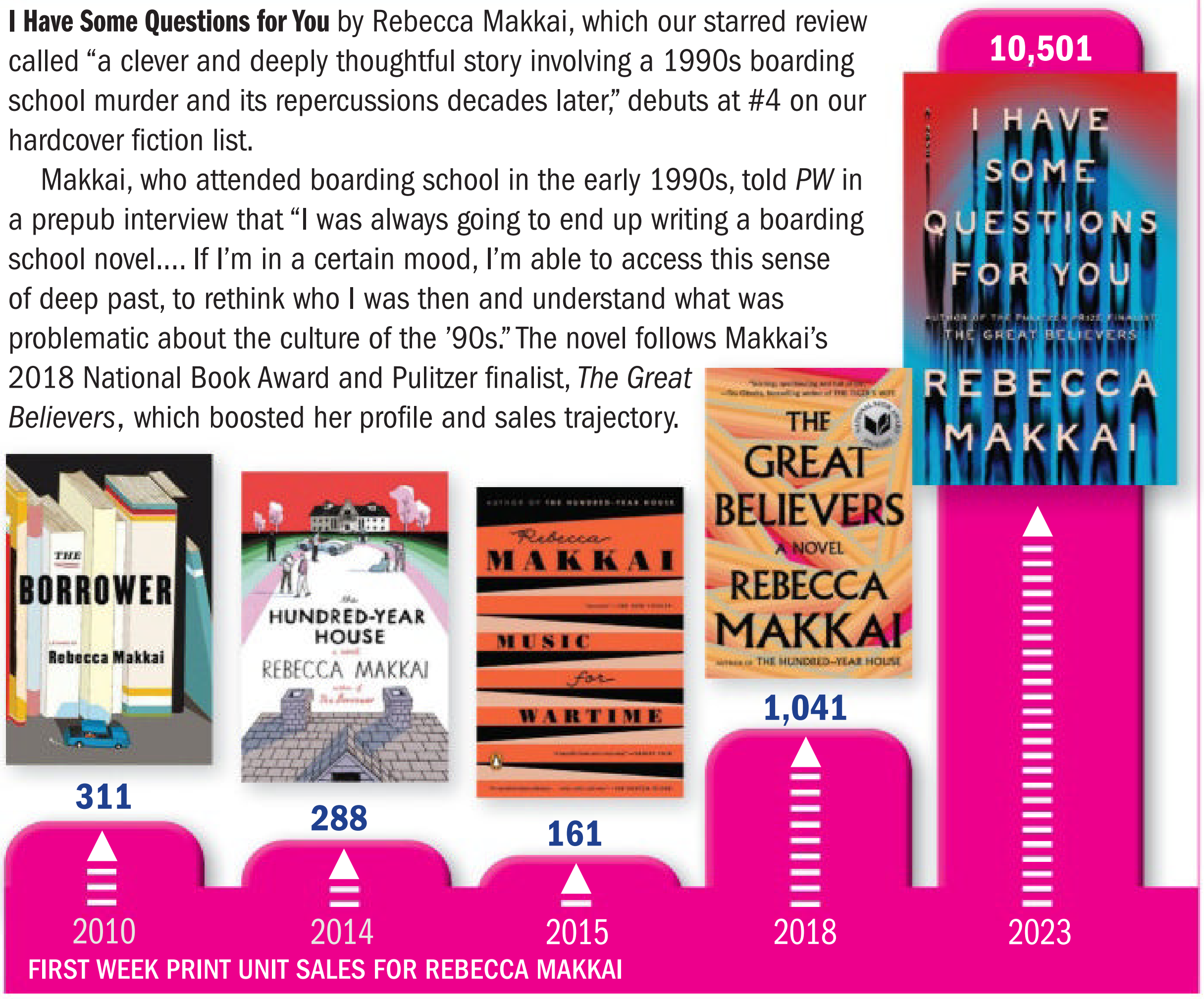
# Behind the Bestsellers FEB. 19–25, 2023

BY CAROLYN JURIS

## Asked and Answered

**I Have Some Questions for You** by Rebecca Makkai, which our starred review called "a clever and deeply thoughtful story involving a 1990s boarding school murder and its repercussions decades later," debuts at #4 on our hardcover fiction list.

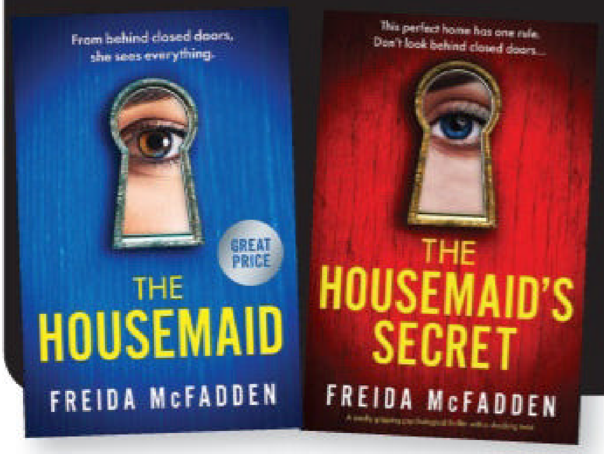
Makkai, who attended boarding school in the early 1990s, told *PW* in a prepub interview that "I was always going to end up writing a boarding school novel.... If I'm in a certain mood, I'm able to access this sense of deep past, to rethink who I was then and understand what was problematic about the culture of the '90s." The novel follows Makkai's 2018 National Book Award and Pulitzer finalist, *The Great Believers*, which boosted her profile and sales trajectory.



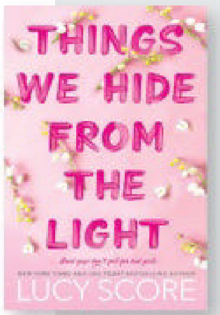
FIRST WEEK PRINT UNIT SALES FOR REBECCA MAKKAI

## SEEING DOUBLE

Freida McFadden's domestic thriller **The Housemaid's Secret** debuts at #6 on our trade paperback list. It's the sequel to *The Housemaid*, which has sold 133K print copies since its August publication and claimed a consistent spot on our trade paper list; it's up three spots this week to #9. A recent article in the *Bookseller* called the novel the all-time biggest earner for Bookouture, a decade-old digital startup that Hachette U.K. acquired in 2017. The imprint has partnered with Grand Central on many of its U.S. releases, including *The Housemaid*; *The Housemaid's Secret* was released here as a Bookouture title.



## NEW & NOTABLE

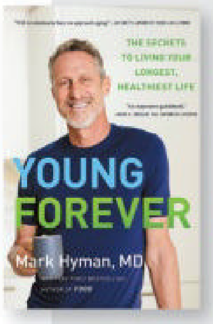


**THINGS WE HIDE FROM THE LIGHT**

Lucy Score

*#1 Trade Paperback, #1 overall*

"Score pairs a sassy insurance investigator with the police chief of a sleepy Virginia town in her sprawling second Knockemout romance," according to our review. She "keeps the pages turning with a twisty, danger-laced plot; feisty leads; and blazing passion."



**YOUNG FOREVER**

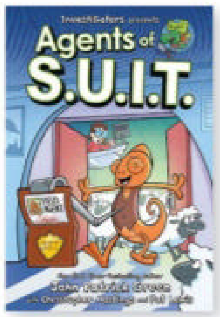
Mark Hyman

*#1 Hardcover Nonfiction, #2 overall*

"Outlining strategies to maintain good health into one's later years, Hyman promotes common wisdom about refraining from smoking, getting '75 minutes of vigorous exercise per week,' and maintaining a protein-rich diet," per our review. "A few unrealistic remedies aside, this makes for a solid primer on keeping up one's health in old age."

## New Outfit

Since John Patrick Green launched his InvestiGators middle grade series in 2020, the six pun-packed graphic novels have sold a combined 738K print copies. Now a spin-off series launches with **InvestiGators: Agents of S.U.I.T.**, #3 on our children's fiction list. Green began thinking about expanding the world of the InvestiGators as the original books picked up steam, he told *PW* in a prepub interview, and fielded anonymous submissions in order to find cowriter Christopher Hastings, a fellow SVA alum and the creator of the webcomic *Adventures of Dr. McNinja*, and illustrator Pat Lewis, whose past projects include work on other children's books and in *Highlights*.



## TOP 10 OVERALL

| RANK | TITLE | AUTHOR | IMPRINT | UNITS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Things We Hide from the Light** | Lucy Score | Bloom | 63,971 |
| 2 | **Young Forever** | Mark Hyman | Little, Brown Spark | 38,449 |
| 3 | **It Starts with Us** | Colleen Hoover | Atria | 38,169 |
| 4 | **It Ends with Us** | Colleen Hoover | Atria | 33,487 |
| 5 | **Heart Bones** | Colleen Hoover | Atria | 30,896 |
| 6 | **Atomic Habits** | James Clear | Avery | 22,783 |
| 7 | **Verity** | Colleen Hoover | Grand Central | 21,326 |
| 8 | **The Adventure Zone: The Eleventh Hour** | Clint McElroy et al. | First Second | 19,757 |
| 9 | **Lessons in Chemistry** | Bonnie Garmus | Doubleday | 19,234 |
| 10 | **Spare** | Prince Harry | Random House | 18,708 |

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ALL PRINT UNIT SALES PER NPD BOOKSCAN EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

# Adult Bestsellers | FEB. 19–25, 2023

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## Hardcover Frontlist Fiction

| RANK | LW | TITLE | AUTHOR | IMPRINT | ISBN | UNITS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | **Lessons in Chemistry** | Bonnie Garmus | Doubleday | 9780385547345 | 19,234 |
| 2 | 2 | **Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow** | Gabrielle Zevin | Knopf | 9780593321201 | 11,190 |
| 3 | – | **Burner** | Mark Greaney | Berkley | 9780593548103 | 10,590 |
| 4 | – | **I Have Some Questions for You** | Rebecca Makkai | Viking | 9780593490143 | 10,501 |
| 5 | 3 | **Someone Else's Shoes** | Jojo Moyes | Viking/Dorman | 9781984879295 | 8,919 |
| 6 | – | **The Last Kingdom** | Steve Berry | Grand Central | 9781538720998 | 8,443 |
| 7 | 5 | **The Boys from Biloxi** | John Grisham | Doubleday | 9780385548922 | 7,017 |
| 8 | 6 | **Demon Copperhead** | Barbara Kingsolver | Harper | 9780063251922 | 6,935 |
| 9 | – | **Murder Your Employer** | Rupert Holmes | Avid Reader | 9781451648218 | 5,757 |
| 10 | 4 | **Encore in Death** | J.D. Robb | St. Martin's | 9781250284082 | 5,721 |
| 11 | 8 | **Fairy Tale** | Stephen King | Scribner | 9781668002179 | 5,676 |
| 12 | 7 | **The House in the Pines** | Ana Reyes | Dutton | 9780593186718 | 5,139 |
| 13 | 10 | **Mad Honey** | Picoult/Boylan | Ballantine | 9781984818386 | 4,975 |
| 14 | 9 | **The House of Wolves** | Patterson/Lupica | Little, Brown | 9780316404297 | 4,869 |
| 15 | 12 | **Remarkably Bright Creatures** | Shelby Van Pelt | Ecco Press | 9780063204157 | 4,755 |
| 16 | 13 | **Verity** | Colleen Hoover | Grand Central | 9781538739723 | 3,920 |
| 17 | – | **The Adventure Zone: The Eleventh Hour** | Clint McElroy et al. | First Second | 9781250793799 | 3,531 |
| 18 | 17 | **Horse** | Geraldine Brooks | Viking | 9780399562969 | 3,394 |
| 19 | 27 | **Maame** | Jessica George | St. Martin's | 9781250282521 | 3,031 |
| 20 | 16 | **How to Sell a Haunted House** | Grady Hendrix | Berkley | 9780593201268 | 3,027 |

## Hardcover Frontlist Nonfiction

| RANK | LW | TITLE | AUTHOR | IMPRINT | ISBN | UNITS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | – | **Young Forever** | Mark Hyman | Little, Brown Spark | 9780316453189 | 38,449 |
| 2 | 1 | **Spare** | Prince Harry | Random House | 9780593593806 | 18,708 |
| 3 | – | **All My Knotted-Up Life** | Beth Moore | Tyndale | 9781496472670 | 14,360 |
| 4 | – | **Two Weeks Notice** | Amy Porterfield | Hay House Business | 9781401969875 | 11,838 |
| 5 | 3 | **The Creative Act** | Rick Rubin | Penguin Press | 9780593652886 | 11,720 |
| 6 | 2 | **8 Rules of Love** | Jay Shetty | Simon & Schuster | 9781982183066 | 11,464 |
| 7 | – | **It's Ok to Be Angry About Capitalism** | Bernie Sanders | Crown | 9780593238714 | 9,733 |
| 8 | – | **The Awe of God** | John Bevere | Thomas Nelson | 9781400336708 | 9,461 |
| 9 | 8 | **I'm Glad My Mom Died** | Jennette McCurdy | Simon & Schuster | 9781982185824 | 9,351 |
| 10 | 6 | **Walk the Blue Line** | Patterson/Eversmann | Little, Brown | 9780316406604 | 8,568 |
| 11 | – | **The Power of Wonder** | Monica C. Parker | TarcherPerigee | 9780593419366 | 8,235 |
| 12 | 7 | **The Light We Carry** | Michelle Obama | Crown | 9780593237465 | 7,575 |
| 13 | – | **The Emotional Lives of Teenagers** | Lisa Damour | Ballantine | 9780593500019 | 6,838 |
| 14 | 4 | **The Lives We Actually Have** | Bowler/Richie | Convergent | 9780593193709 | 5,656 |
| 15 | 10 | **Never Give an Inch** | Mike Pompeo | Broadside | 9780063247444 | 5,092 |
| 16 | – | **Be an Angel** | Roma Downey | Convergent | 9780593444023 | 4,920 |
| 17 | – | **The Origins of You** | Vienna Pharaon | Putnam | 9780593539910 | 4,698 |
| 18 | – | **Keys from the Golden Vault** | – | Wizards of the Coast | 9780786968961 | 4,426 |
| 19 | 21 | **While Time Remains** | Yeonmi Park | Threshold | 9781668003312 | 4,374 |
| 20 | – | **The Unsold Mindset** | Coggins/Brown | Harper Business | 9780063204904 | 4,300 |

LW: rank last week

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## Mass Market Frontlist

| RANK | LW | TITLE | AUTHOR | IMPRINT | ISBN | UNITS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | Rich Dad Poor Dad | Robert T. Kiyosaki | Plata | 9781612681139 | 4,944 |
| 2 | 2 | Beautiful | Danielle Steel | Dell | 9781984821669 | 3,704 |
| 3 | 3 | The Red Book | James Patterson | Grand Central | 9781538752821 | 3,045 |
| 4 | 4 | Absolute Fear | Lisa Jackson | Zebra | 9781420154931 | 2,650 |
| 5 | 5 | When Justice Rides | B.J. Daniels | HQN | 9781335530059 | 2,640 |
| 6 | 6 | High Stakes | Danielle Steel | Dell | 9781984821737 | 2,623 |
| 7 | 7 | 21st Birthday | Patterson/Paetro | Grand Central | 9781538752869 | 2,585 |
| 8 | 11 | Shadows Reel | C.J. Box | Putnam | 9780593331293 | 2,393 |
| 9 | 9 | Game On | Janet Evanovich | Pocket | 9781982154882 | 2,331 |
| 10 | 12 | Desperation in Death | J.D. Robb | St. Martin's | 9781250849717 | 2,235 |
| 11 | 10 | In Her Highlander's Bed | Lynsay Sands | Avon | 9780063135314 | 2,145 |
| 12 | 8 | Fort Misery | Johnstone/Johnstone | Pinnacle | 9780786049615 | 2,106 |
| 13 | 14 | Macgregor Ever After | Nora Roberts | Silhouette | 9781335426000 | 1,951 |
| 14 | 17 | City of the Dead | Jonathan Kellerman | Ballantine | 9780525618607 | 1,920 |
| 15 | 16 | The Judge's List | John Grisham | Vintage | 9780593157831 | 1,860 |
| 16 | 21 | Tick Tock | Fern Michaels | Zebra | 9781420154245 | 1,777 |
| 17 | 13 | Meant to Be | Nora Roberts | St. Martin's | 9781250873798 | 1,722 |
| 18 | 19 | The Fires of Hell | Johnstone/Johnstone | Pinnacle | 9780786049592 | 1,697 |
| 19 | 20 | A Gambling Man | David Baldacci | Grand Central | 9781538719657 | 1,668 |
| 20 | 15 | Recovery Road | Christine Feehan | Berkley | 9780593439210 | 1,632 |

## Trade Paperback Frontlist

| RANK | LW | TITLE | AUTHOR | IMPRINT | ISBN | UNITS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | – | Things We Hide from the Light | Lucy Score | Bloom | 9781728276113 | 63,971 |
| 2 | 1 | It Starts with Us | Colleen Hoover | Atria | 9781668001226 | 38,169 |
| 3 | 2 | Heart Bones | Colleen Hoover | Atria | 9781668021910 | 30,896 |
| 4 | – | The Adventure Zone: The Eleventh Hour | Clint McElroy et al. | First Second | 9781250793782 | 19,757 |
| 5 | – | The Paris Apartment | Lucy Foley | Morrow | 9780063003064 | 12,387 |
| 6 | – | The Housemaid's Secret | Freida McFadden | Bookouture | 9781837901326 | 10,724 |
| 7 | 7 | Twisted Love | Ana Huang | Bloom | 9781728274867 | 10,055 |
| 8 | 4 | Icebreaker | Hannah Grace | Atria | 9781668026038 | 9,975 |
| 9 | 12 | The Housemaid | Freida McFadden | Grand Central | 9781538742570 | 8,552 |
| 10 | 3 | 3 Days to Live | James Patterson | Grand Central | 9781538752746 | 7,601 |
| 11 | 10 | Maybe Now | Colleen Hoover | Atria | 9781668013342 | 7,178 |
| 12 | – | Toilet-Bound Hanako-Kun, Vol. 17 | Aidairo | Yen | 9781975359355 | 7,119 |
| 13 | 11 | Secretly Yours | Tessa Bailey | Avon | 9780063238985 | 6,885 |
| 14 | 9 | The Maid | Nita Prose | Ballantine | 9780593356173 | 6,644 |
| 15 | 13 | And There He Kept Her | Joshua Moehling | Poisoned Pen | 9781728275772 | 6,590 |
| 16 | 21 | Twisted Games | Ana Huang | Bloom | 9781728274874 | 6,373 |
| 17 | – | Blue Lock 5 | Kaneshiro/Nomura | Kodansha | 9781646516629 | 6,323 |
| 18 | 15 | The Hotel Nantucket | Elin Hilderbrand | Back Bay | 9780316258982 | 5,859 |
| 19 | 19 | A Court of Silver Flames | Sarah J. Maas | Bloomsbury | 9781635577990 | 5,672 |
| 20 | 18 | Final Offer | Lauren Asher | Bloom | 9781728272221 | 5,498 |

LW: rank last week

# Children's Bestsellers | FEB. 19–25, 2023

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## Children's Frontlist Fiction

| RANK | TITLE | AUTHOR | IMPRINT | ISBN | UNITS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Collaborations** (Cat Kid Comic Club #4) | Dav Pilkey | Graphix | 9781338846621 | 13,243 |
| 2 | **Diper Överlöde** (Diary of a Wimpy Kid #17) | Jeff Kinney | Amulet | 9781419762949 | 12,853 |
| 3 | **InvestiGators: Agents of S.U.I.T.** | John Patrick Green | First Second | 9781250852564 | 12,674 |
| 4 | **Moon Rising** (Wings of Fire Graphic Novel #6) | Sutherland/Holmes | Graphix | 9781338730890 | 8,385 |
| 5 | **Mary Anne's Bad Luck Mystery** (The Baby-Sitters Club Graphic Novel #13) | Martin/Cheng | Graphix | 9781338616101 | 7,447 |
| 6 | **As Good as Dead** | Holly Jackson | Ember | 9780593379882 | 6,207 |
| 7 | **Good Girl, Bad Blood** | Holly Jackson | Ember | 9781984896438 | 5,171 |
| 8 | **Karen's Birthday** (Baby-Sitters Little Sister Graphic Novel #6) | Martin/Farina | Graphix | 9781338762587 | 4,795 |
| 9 | **Whale Done** (FunJungle #8) | Stuart Gibbs | Simon & Schuster | 9781534499317 | 4,590 |
| 10 | **Chain of Thorns** | Cassandra Clare | McElderry | 9781481431934 | 4,560 |
| 11 | **Bluebird** | Sharon Cameron | Scholastic | 9781338355970 | 3,646 |
| 12 | **The Hawthorne Legacy** | Jennifer Lynn Barnes | Little, Brown | 9780316105187 | 3,386 |
| 13 | **Five Nights at Freddy's** (Fazbear Frights Graphic Novel Collection #1) | Scott Cawthon | Graphix | 9781338792676 | 3,271 |
| 14 | **Better Than the Movies** | Lynn Painter | Simon & Schuster | 9781534467637 | 3,232 |
| 15 | **Nick and Charlie** | Alice Oseman | Scholastic Press | 9781338885101 | 3,095 |
| 16 | **On Purpose** (Cat Kid Comic Club #3) | Dav Pilkey | Graphix | 9781338801941 | 3,056 |
| 17 | **Jessi's Secret Language** (The Baby-Sitters Club Graphic Novel #12) | Martin/Chau | Graphix | 9781338616071 | 2,964 |
| 18 | **You'd Be Home Now** | Kathleen Glasgow | Ember | 9780525708070 | 2,855 |
| 19 | **The Stolen Heir** | Holly Black | Little, Brown | 9780316592703 | 2,799 |
| 20 | **The Human Kaboom** | Adam Rubin | Putnam | 9780593462393 | 2,771 |
| 21 | **Five Survive** | Holly Jackson | Delacorte | 9780593374160 | 2,739 |
| 22 | **Missing Dead Girls** | Sara Walters | Sourcebooks Fire | 9781728234137 | 2,646 |
| 23 | **Best Friends:** (Sweet Valley Twins Graphic Novel #1) | Francine Pascal | Random House Graphic | 9780593376461 | 2,521 |
| 24 | **Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix** | Rowling/Kay/Packer | Scholastic | 9780545791434 | 2,418 |
| 25 | **The Final Gambit** | Jennifer Lynn Barnes | Little, Brown | 9780316370950 | 2,315 |

## Children's Picture Books

| RANK | TITLE | AUTHOR | IMPRINT | ISBN | UNITS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **The Very Hungry Caterpillar** | Eric Carle | Philomel | 9780399226908 | 14,175 |
| 2 | **Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?** | Martin/Carle | Holt | 9780805047905 | 14,060 |
| 3 | **You're My Little Honey Bunny** | Edwards/Marshall | Silver Dolphin | 9781684126187 | 13,133 |
| 4 | **Green Eggs and Ham** | Dr. Seuss | Random House | 9780394800165 | 12,711 |
| 5 | **Daddy Hugs** | – | Igloo | 9781803683591 | 12,532 |
| 6 | **Little Blue Truck's Springtime** | Schertle/McElmurry | Clarion | 9780544938090 | 12,133 |
| 7 | **One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish** | Dr. Seuss | Random House | 9780394800134 | 11,308 |
| 8 | **Oh, the Places You'll Go!** | Dr. Seuss | Random House | 9780679805274 | 10,774 |
| 9 | **You're My Little Cuddle Bug** | Edwards/Marshall | Silver Dolphin | 9781684122585 | 10,264 |
| 10 | **Love from the Crayons** | Daywalt/Jeffers | Penguin Workshop | 9781524792688 | 10,098 |
| 11 | **I Love You to the Moon and Back** | Hepworth/Warnes | Tiger Tales | 9781589255517 | 10,097 |
| 12 | **Guess How Much I Love You** | McBratney/Jeram | Candlewick | 9781536210637 | 8,946 |
| 13 | **Never Touch a Grumpy Bunny!** | Rosie Greening | Make Believe | 9781800582682 | 8,925 |
| 14 | **The Cat in the Hat** | Dr. Seuss | Random House | 9780394800011 | 8,281 |
| 15 | **How to Catch a Leprechaun** | Wallace/Elkerton | Sourcebooks Wonderland | 9781492632917 | 8,210 |
| 16 | **Goodnight Moon** | Brown/Hurd | HarperFestival | 9780694003617 | 7,812 |
| 17 | **Easter** (Bluey) | – | Penguin Young Readers | 9780593658383 | 7,776 |
| 18 | **Happy Easter, Mouse!** | Numeroff/Bond | HarperFestival | 9780694014224 | 7,645 |
| 19 | **My Little Golden Book About Dolly Parton** | Hopkinson/Dong | Golden | 9780593306857 | 7,442 |
| 20 | **I Love You Like No Otter** | Rossner/Hanson | Sourcebooks Wonderland | 9781728213743 | 7,097 |
| 21 | **It's Not Easy Being a Bunny** | Sadler/Bollen | Random House | 9780394861029 | 7,043 |
| 22 | **Chicka Chicka Boom Boom** | Martin/Archambault/Ehlert | Little Simon | 9781442450707 | 6,811 |
| 23 | **Disney Bunnies All Ears** | Calliope Glass | Disney Press | 9781484722107 | 6,545 |
| 24 | **Count on the Easter Pups!** | – | Random House | 9781524768720 | 6,030 |
| 25 | **Hippity, Hoppity, Little Bunny** | – | Cottage Door | 9781680524772 | 5,771 |

Patrick Brower, co-owner of Challengers Comics + Conversation in Chicago.

MANGA
MANGA

# Comics Retailers Navigate a New Normal

## Booksellers talk shop about how comics sales—and store management challenges—grew in 2022

### By David Harper

In 2022, the comics retail sector attempted to level out the roller-coaster track of the recent pandemic years. After a period of significant change in the industry, paired with record sales, many retailers expressed a desire for a return to normalcy this past year—and a continued uptick in revenue.

The sales gains have held for now, at the very least. Coming off the high-water mark of 2021, adult graphic novels still boasted a modest 4.6% sales increase in 2022, according to NPD BookScan, with YA comics sales rising a surprising 20%. Though kids' and middle grade graphic novels dipped by 3%, the category is still up 29% over 2020. Overall, it was a welcome result.

Last year wasn't just a good year for sales. Supply chain issues also improved dramatically, particularly on the manga front, and there was stabilization in single-issue comics distribution, even if it remained imperfect. However, word on the ground from retailers was that added workload, increasingly complex logistics, and a glut of product complicated the overall positive outlook.

*PW*'s annual comics retailer survey offers an anecdotal look into the comics retail landscape. We checked in with retailers at six comics outlets across North America, including from the direct market—a section of the industry comprising 3,000 or so independent shops that buy mostly nonreturnable stock at

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VIZ

wholesale from direct-market distributors—and general bookstores with robust graphic novels sections. Owners and staff shared their thoughts on year-to-year performance, the titles and genres that ratcheted up sales, the impact of economic uncertainty and industry changes, and their projections and mood moving into 2023.

While nearly every bookseller *PW* spoke with is upbeat about the market, some comics shops dealt with a slight downturn on the single-issue comic side in 2022, with the broader graphic novel channel offsetting that dip. Sales there were driven by manga and adult graphic novels. Frustration was expressed, though, about navigating the rapid growth in output from publishers that rushed to capitalize on the hot market. Retailers contended with an overabundance of title options, including variant covers (a quirk of the comics market: alternative covers for single-issue comics designed for collecting purposes). Shoppers like choices, but stores had to gamble on what to stock, resulting in high variance in sales and lengthy ordering processes. The impact of economic uncertainty was also starting to be felt.

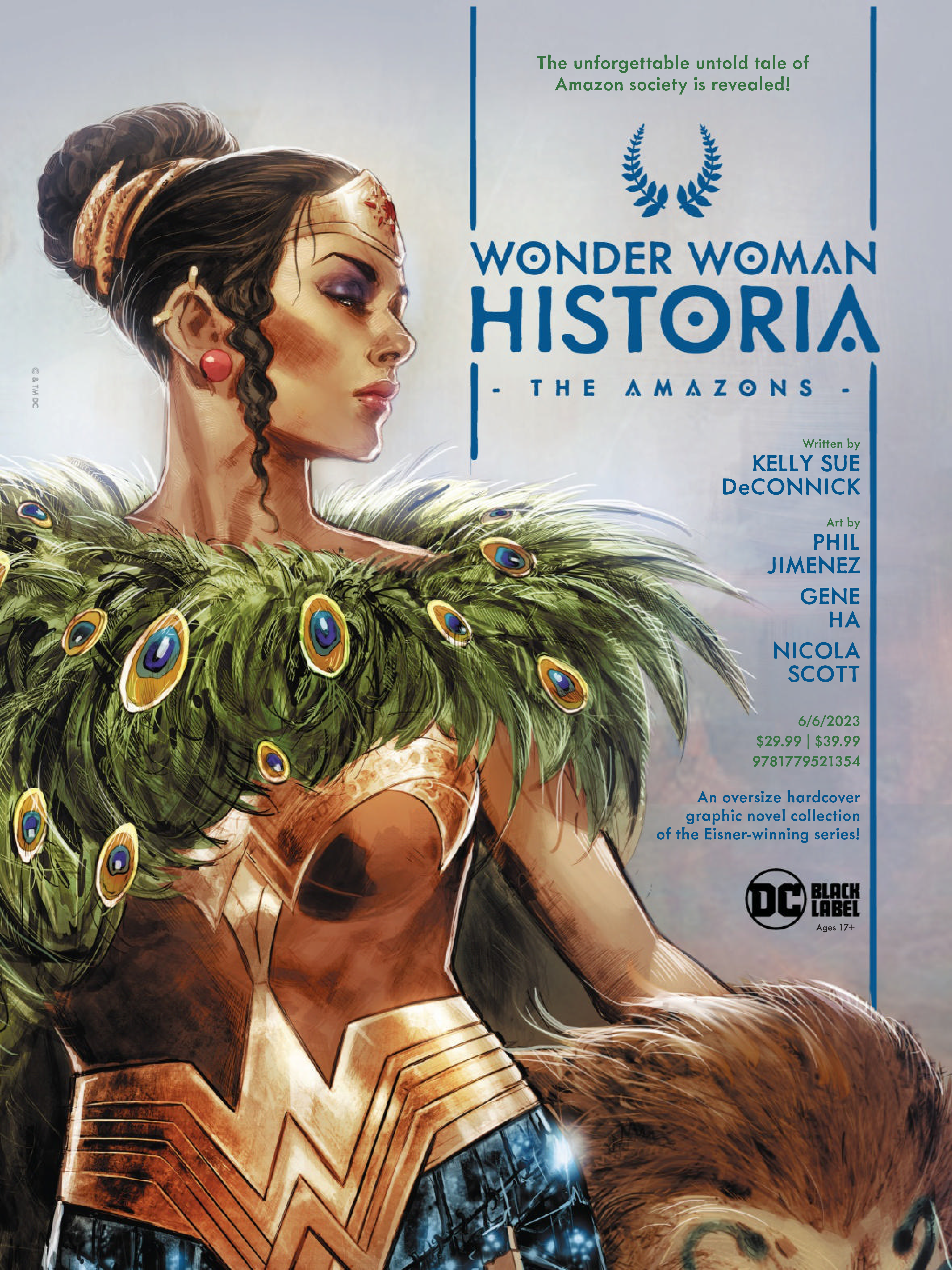
But even if anxieties occasionally spiked behind the register, eager fans brought contagious enthusiasm through the door. Comics retailers closed the year optimistic that they're steering toward a bright future—particularly if some issues are cleaned up along the route.

## A "weird" yet successful year

Jenn Haines, the owner of The Dragon in Guelph, Ontario, sums 2022 up as "a bit of a weird one in retrospect." That's because shops saw that this year's largely flat or improved performance came with associated costs. For example, Haines mentions that her two storefronts enjoyed a 13% sales increase over 2021, but that she also closed a third location "in a strategic move" in late August. Her lease was up at an outlet that didn't grow her customer base as much as it segmented it. The savings on rent allowed her to renovate her flagship shop, a move that's proved beneficial. "The business is stronger than ever, and 2023 has started just as strong," Haines says, but "it constantly felt like I was fighting my way to the finish line."

Others chimed in with similarly contrasting reports. They commented on the unique stress factors that came along with riding out boom times in an ongoing period of change. Everyone in

*Jenn Haines, owner of The Dragon in Guelph, Ontario.*



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comics retail continues to deal with the ripple effects of the past couple years.

Challengers Comics + Conversation, a comics shop in Chicago, saw sales increase in 2022, but co-owner Patrick Brower admits it took a toll. “It was the most stressful and hectic behind-the-scenes year I think we’ve ever had,” he says. This stemmed from changes in single-issue comic distribution. Challengers is now buying weekly product from five separate distributors, each of which uses drastically different invoicing systems. It takes five times as long as it used to, he explains, meaning the gains the store made came with significant increased workload.

SPACE COLLECTION
CADETS COLLECTION

*Jen King, owner of Space Cadets Collection Collection in Oak Ridge North, Tex.*

Seth Peagler, the operations manager at Charlotte, N.C., comics shop Heroes Aren’t Hard to Find, has faced similar issues. “On paper, 2022 seems to have been a better year than 2021,” he says, though he adds that it required more time and effort to get there. It isn’t just distribution changes, either. The increase in comic titles and variant covers dramatically lengthens the ordering process.

It seemed like even if 2022 was a success on the surface, it was a mixed bag for many retailers. Space Cadets Collection Collection in Oak Ridge North, Tex., saw a sales dip in the second half of the year, according to owner Jen King. “Customers have been much more careful about spending their money,” she speculates. “After the spending spree that was 2021, with the surge in interest in collectibles and the regular influx of stimulus money, it’s a bit of a shock to readjust to the current mindset of our customer base. It’s been a big slowdown.”

There was good news in comments about consumer enthusiasm and increased foot traffic. Alex Hemming, a manager of Los Angeles’s Skylight Books, emphasizes that sales were still high in 2022, even if they normalized “compared to 2021.” He’s seen “a lot of excitement around comics,” he says, with customers expanding their genre horizons.

Brower, who has been a retailer for more than 32 years, echoes

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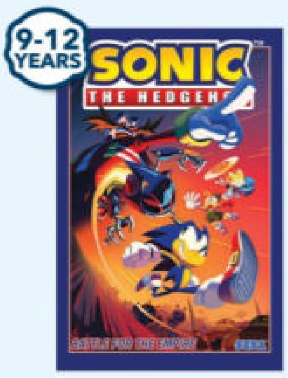

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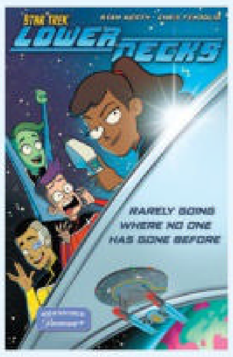

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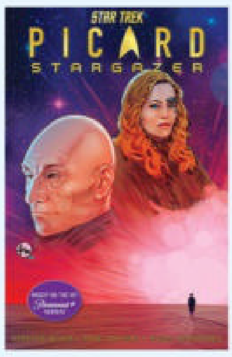

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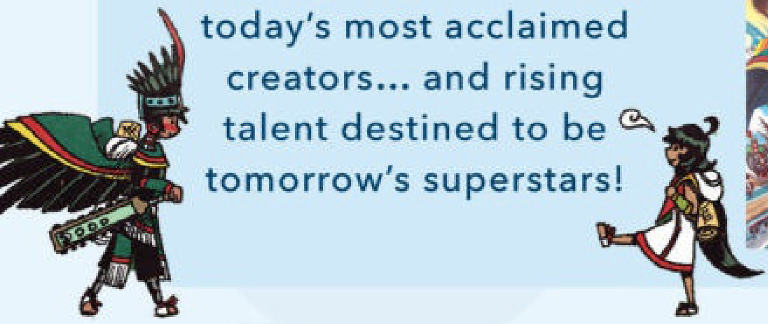

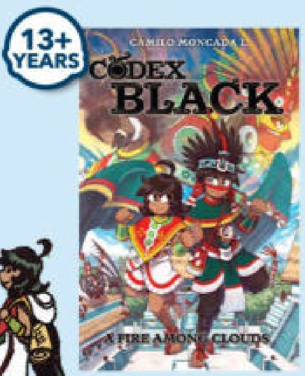

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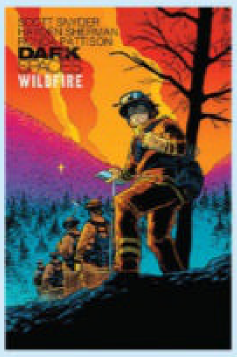

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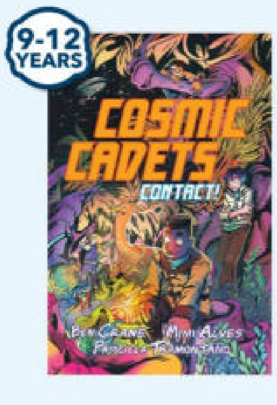

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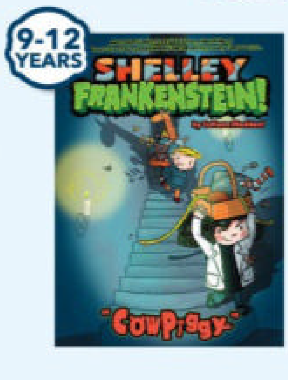

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that sentiment: "More people are buying comics than ever before."

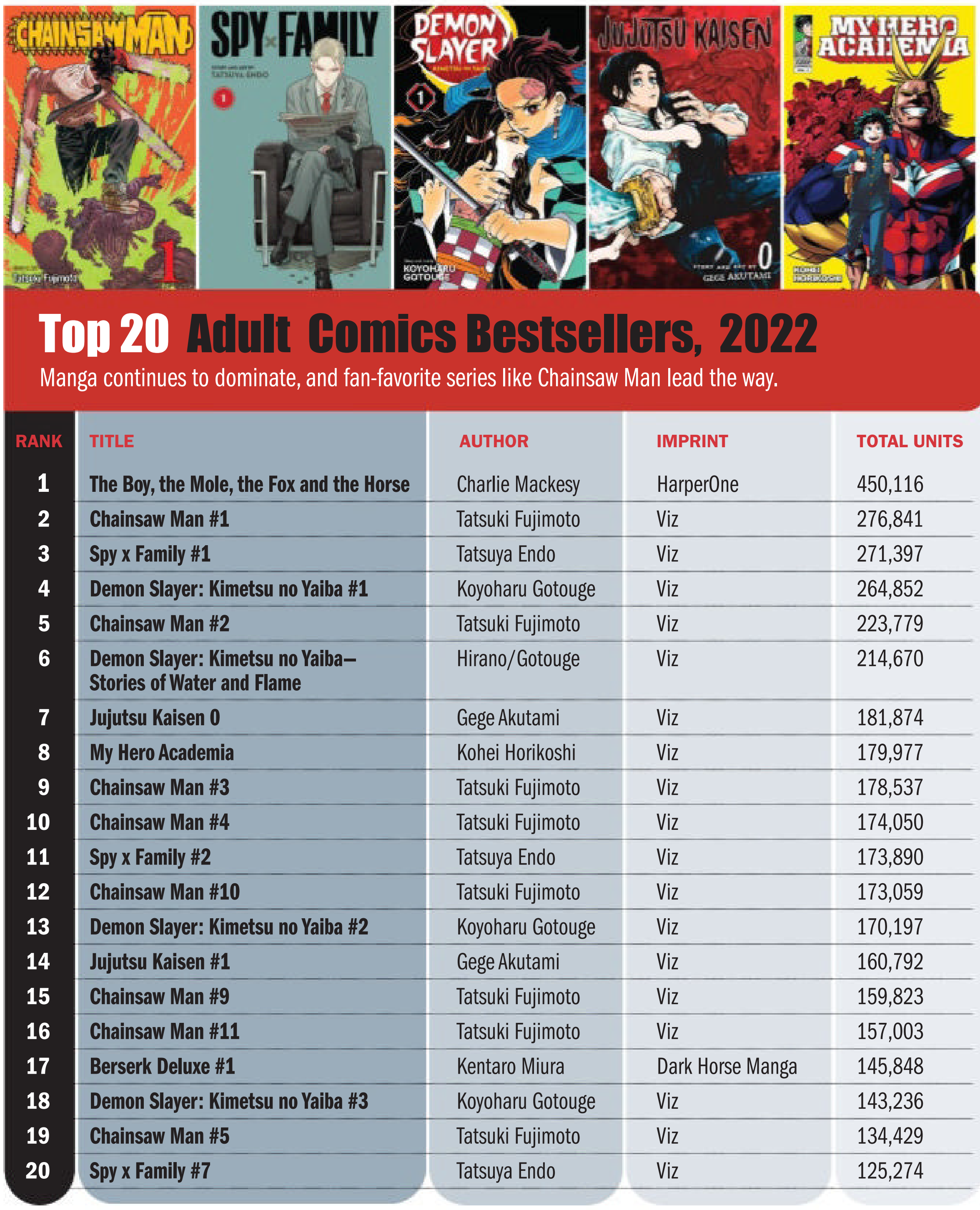
And Susanne König, co-owner of Powerhouse Books, trumpeted sales increases for comics and graphic novels, particularly for younger readers, in all three of her Brooklyn stores.

## Hot titles and holiday sellers

Manga continued its remarkable performance last year. Reissues of independent manga and "any horror manga" thrived at Skylight, per Hemming. Space Cadets capitalized on the release of a new My Hero Academia series box set timed for the holidays. Other stores report similarly strong performance.

"In the graphic novel space, manga continued to dominate," Haines says. "Manga accounted for 30% of our graphic novels sales last year, which was an increase of 5% over 2021. In fact, with sales increasing across the board over last year, our manga sales actually doubled from 2021 to 2022."

However, retailers once again reported that supply chain troubles made it hard to consistently stock the booming category, though the conditions are improving. And with exploding options, it was also a challenge to simply determine the right series to carry. Brower says he found that "variety is not the answer." Despite the deluge in first volumes launching each month, Brower believes the store could do just as well



### Top 20 Adult Comics Bestsellers, 2022

Manga continues to dominate, and fan-favorite series like Chainsaw Man lead the way.

| RANK | TITLE | AUTHOR | IMPRINT | TOTAL UNITS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse** | Charlie Mackesy | HarperOne | 450,116 |
| 2 | **Chainsaw Man #1** | Tatsuki Fujimoto | Viz | 276,841 |
| 3 | **Spy x Family #1** | Tatsuya Endo | Viz | 271,397 |
| 4 | **Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba #1** | Koyoharu Gotouge | Viz | 264,852 |
| 5 | **Chainsaw Man #2** | Tatsuki Fujimoto | Viz | 223,779 |
| 6 | **Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba—Stories of Water and Flame** | Hirano/Gotouge | Viz | 214,670 |
| 7 | **Jujutsu Kaisen 0** | Gege Akutami | Viz | 181,874 |
| 8 | **My Hero Academia** | Kohei Horikoshi | Viz | 179,977 |
| 9 | **Chainsaw Man #3** | Tatsuki Fujimoto | Viz | 178,537 |
| 10 | **Chainsaw Man #4** | Tatsuki Fujimoto | Viz | 174,050 |
| 11 | **Spy x Family #2** | Tatsuya Endo | Viz | 173,890 |
| 12 | **Chainsaw Man #10** | Tatsuki Fujimoto | Viz | 173,059 |
| 13 | **Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba #2** | Koyoharu Gotouge | Viz | 170,197 |
| 14 | **Jujutsu Kaisen #1** | Gege Akutami | Viz | 160,792 |
| 15 | **Chainsaw Man #9** | Tatsuki Fujimoto | Viz | 159,823 |
| 16 | **Chainsaw Man #11** | Tatsuki Fujimoto | Viz | 157,003 |
| 17 | **Berserk Deluxe #1** | Kentaro Miura | Dark Horse Manga | 145,848 |
| 18 | **Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba #3** | Koyoharu Gotouge | Viz | 143,236 |
| 19 | **Chainsaw Man #5** | Tatsuki Fujimoto | Viz | 134,429 |
| 20 | **Spy x Family #7** | Tatsuya Endo | Viz | 125,274 |

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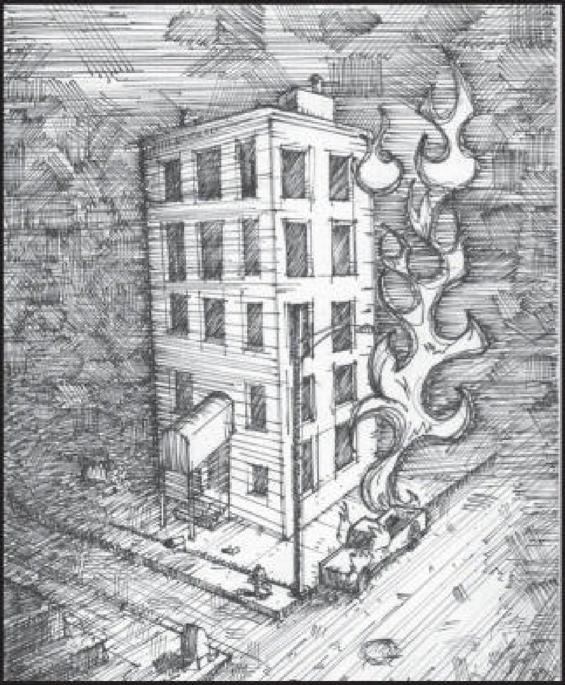

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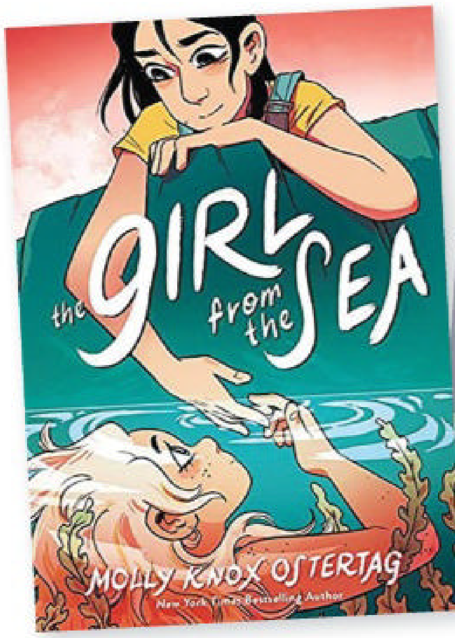
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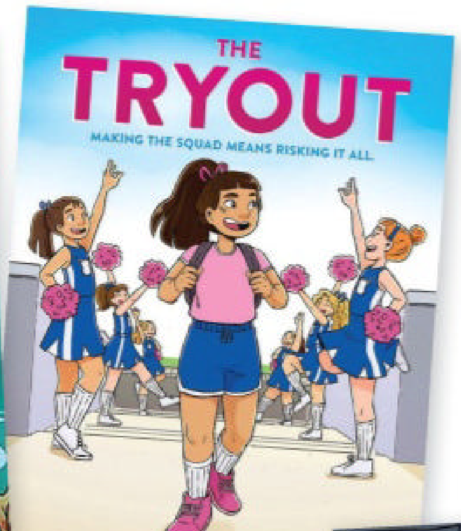
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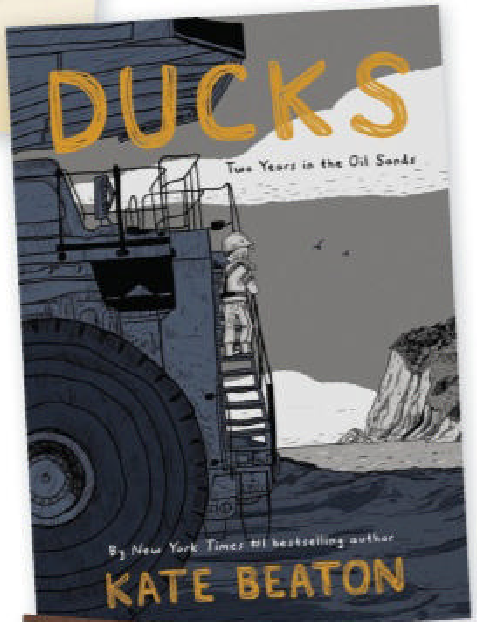
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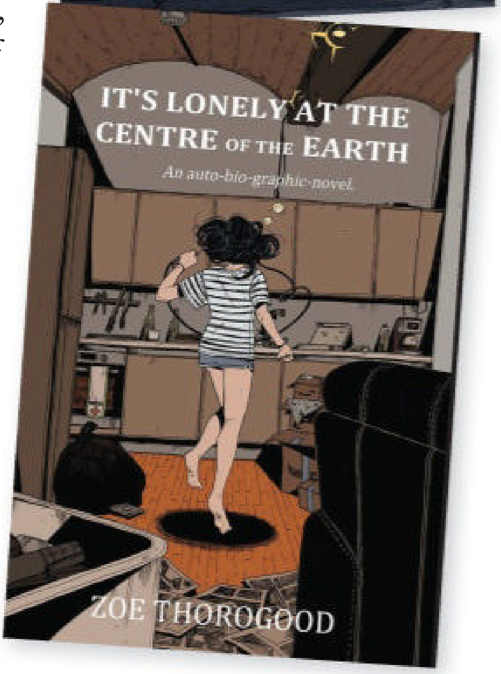
IT'S LONELY AT THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH
An auto-bio-graphic-novel
ZOE THOROGOOD

"if not better" by simply focusing efforts on top-selling series such as Spy x Family and Chainsaw Man.

Elsewhere, middle grade and YA graphic novels led sales. King describes Space Cadets' all-ages section as "by far the strongest section in our store," with its space doubling in 2022 with a similarly significant increase in sales. Dav Pilkey's latest Cat Kid volume was a top holiday performer for several shops.

Powerhouse almost exclusively focuses on the kids' market in its graphic novel buying. Brittany Jarvis, children's book buyer for the store, notes a number of middle grade holiday standouts, including Molly Ostertag's queer mermaid romance *The Girl from the Sea*, Christina Soontornvat and Joanna Cacao's cheerleader drama *The Tryout*, Sophie Escabasse's magical family adventure series Witches of Brooklyn, and—as usual—Jeff Kinney's latest in the bestselling Diary of a Wimpy Kid series leading the way.

"The popularity among kids of a graphic novel is pretty heavily dependent on it being a series," Jarvis observes. "Of course, there are some amazing standalone graphic novels that have seen success, but kids love series."

As for adult graphic novels, both comics shops and general bookstores cited Kate Beaton's graphic memoir *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands* as a holiday standout; the account of the cartoonist's time working in the North Canadian fuel industry appeared on Barack Obama's reading list and several best-of-year lists, including *PW*'s top 10. But a surprise top seller, Zoe Thorogood's creatively drawn autobiographical graphic novel *It's Lonely at the Centre of the Earth*, could have moved even more copies if availability had been consistent, Brower says. The popular Image Comics release was out of print during the holidays, much to the chagrin of the veteran retailer.

Among the surveyed retailers, the graphic novel format was the dominant player in sales gains. For shops focused on serving a more traditional superhero fan base, though, single issues still moved. Peagler reports that "mainstream superhero comics continue to be a predominant driver" for his customers, perhaps unsurprising at a shop named Heroes. Haines emphasizes that DC and Marvel's offerings "continued to be as strong as they were in 2021," with superhero favorites such as Deadpool, the

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Fantastic Four, and Spider-Man leading the way with debuts of new volumes. The return of Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples's Saga series was also warmly received.

But Brower, in contrast, saw the single-issue comics format lag. He listed key genres and categories and how they performed at his long-standing fan-base home base in the Midwest, and only three declined: superheroes, single-issue comics, and merchandise like posters and enamel pins. Handselling single-issue titles used to be easy for Brower and his team, he says, but has grown increasingly difficult.

## A changing industry and economy

Despite strong sales, retailers faced headwinds and feared fallout from industry and world economic shifts. The instability in the larger economic environment was often cited by booksellers as a cause of concern. An increase in costs, both for consumers and the retailers themselves, forced stores to shift priorities.

CAT KID COMIC CLUB ON PURPOSE
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Five Nights at Freddy's
THE FOURTH CLOSET
THE BABY-SITTERS CLUB
GOOD-BYE STACEY, GOOD-BYE
ANN M. MARTIN
HEARTSTOPPER
BOY MEETS BOY
ALICE OSEMAN
WINGS OF FIRE
THE GRAPHIC NOVEL
THE BRIGHTEST NIGHT

## Top 20 Children's and Young Adult Comics Bestsellers, 2022

Scholastic series Dog Man and Cat Kid own the top of chart.

| RANK | TITLE | AUTHOR | IMPRINT | TOTAL UNITS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **On Purpose (Cat Kid Comic Club #3)** | Dav Pilkey | Graphix | 623,397 |
| 2 | **Perspectives (Cat Kid Comic Club #2)** | Dav Pilkey | Graphix | 400,376 |
| 3 | **Collaborations (Cat Kid Comic Club #4)** | Dav Pilkey | Graphix | 325,842 |
| 4 | **Mothering Heights (Dog Man #10)** | Dav Pilkey | Graphix | 285,345 |
| 5 | **The Fourth Closet (Five Nights at Freddy's #3)** | Scott Cawthon | Graphix | 283,455 |
| 6 | **Good-bye Stacey, Good-bye (The Baby-Sitters Club #11)** | Martin/Epstein | Graphix | 255,269 |
| 7 | **Heartstopper #1** | Alice Oseman | Graphix | 252,884 |
| 8 | **Grime and Punishment (Dog Man #9)** | Dav Pilkey | Graphix | 252,776 |
| 9 | **The Brightest Night (Wings of Fire #5)** | Sutherland/Holmes | Graphix | 247,524 |
| 10 | **Cat Kid Comic Club (Cat Kid Comic Club #1)** | Dav Pilkey | Graphix | 239,092 |
| 11 | **For Whom the Ball Rolls (Dog Man #7)** | Dav Pilkey | Graphix | 227,652 |
| 12 | **The Twisted Ones (Five Nights at Freddy's #2)** | Scott Cawthon | Graphix | 211,868 |
| 13 | **The Silver Eyes (Five Nights at Freddy's #1)** | Scott Cawthon | Graphix | 207,085 |
| 14 | **Fetch-22 (Dog Man #8)** | Dav Pilkey | Graphix | 187,527 |
| 15 | **Heartstopper #2** | Alice Oseman | Graphix | 186,650 |
| 16 | **Dog Man #1** | Dav Pilkey | Graphix | 181,901 |
| 17 | **Heartstopper #4** | Alice Oseman | Graphix | 180,793 |
| 18 | **The Dragonet Prophecy (Wings of Fire #1)** | Sutherland/Holmes | Graphix | 161,043 |
| 19 | **Unleashed (Dog Man #2)** | Dav Pilkey | Graphix | 156,243 |
| 20 | **Lord of the Fleas (Dog Man #5)** | Dav Pilkey | Graphix | 152,935 |

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*Susanne König, co-owner of Powerhouse Books in Brooklyn.*

König reports that while "paperbacks are flying off the shelves," hardcovers have become "a harder sell." And Hemming says that Skylight has had to stop carrying an increasing number of titles simply due to increased shipping costs. Haines notes that increased carrying costs have left The Dragon's profit margins "slashed," limiting the traction and gains from increased revenue numbers.

Brower brought up the fact that comics retail packaging supplies—like bags and boards used to protect single-issue comics—have seen three price increases in the past two years (after zero in the previous decade). While customers understand products being out of stock, frequent price increases lead to contentious conversations with loyal collectors.

Comics supplies aren't the only products increasing in price. Some shops bristled at the unpredictable costs of single-issue comics themselves. Customers continue to be willing to pay as much as $10.99 for one (albeit oversize) single-issue Superman comic, but the concern is that these prices can have a ripple effect. Paying that much for a single release could come at the expense of comics the consumer may have otherwise added to their order. With comics often being nonreturnable in the direct market, that situation leaves shops with inventory that's unlikely to sell.

The good news, though, is that the supply chain "definitely improved" in 2022, according to König—and most retailers agree. But delayed shipments still occurred, sometimes resulting in mammoth bills when stacked on top of regular weekly deliveries.

Hemming found that full-color products, including comics and art books, "are still seeing significant delays." King notes that this can impact planning, especially considering some products were so delayed they were assumed canceled.

The three largest North American distributors of comics—Penguin Random House, Diamond Comic Distributors, and Lunar Distribution—seem to have steadied their operations compared to 2021, according to the retailers surveyed. But there's still progress to be made. Haines—who doubles as the president of ComicsPRO, a trade association for comics retailers—describes each distributor as "emotionally and financially invested in helping retailers," while also admitting that "not one of them is perfect." Minor gripes about each distributor compound when retailers toggle between systems; the shift to a multi-distributor model in recent years has resulted in more work for stores.

As Brower notes, "Regardless of the best intentions, there are too many different ways of doing the same thing, on every level, and it makes retail so much more laborious than ever before."

## More books, not enough time

One industry trend all survey respondents noted is the increased output of comics and graphic novels, as publishers followed sales growth with investment in new imprints and titles. For some, the change has been beneficial—a rising tide of variety that lifts all boats. King is thrilled to serve a more diverse selection of readers, and Haines says that diversity "means there are books on my shelf to satisfy any customer."

Others noted that ordering takes longer, as store buyers navigate and educate themselves about the expanded offerings and variant covers. Differentiating between two

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Brittany Jarvis, children's book buyer at Powerhouse Books.

or three covers for most titles is difficult enough; when prominent launches or anniversary issues come with dozens of variants, the process becomes overwhelming, and stocking shelves can feel like a guessing game.

Having space for all the product is its own problem. Real estate is always a limiting factor for retailers, and with more titles and variants, they must be "ruthless," as Brower puts it, in deciding what they can and cannot showcase on a weekly basis. As a result, some shops have changed how they order, including Skylight, which, Hemming says, has had to become more selective.

Brower says that the increase in consumer choices has resulted in a per-title decrease in sales, leading Challengers to change "the way it thinks about ordering every new series."

Retailers repeatedly brought up the fact that the period of rapid expansion, though fruitful for the overall industry, brought with it the weight of compounding decisions. Peagler believes a "streamlining" would be even more useful for all involved. "This doesn't seem to be a sustainable progression," he says. "It is increasingly difficult to make sure that we are filling the requests of all our customers. It also demands more time from the ordering process, as well as the time it takes to process each week's new shipments."

The aftermath of the chaos of the pandemic is still unfolding. "The industry seems to be trying to get back to some sort of normalcy," Peagler says. "And maybe it slowly is, but I don't think any of us are sure what the new normal is going to look like, be it in the comics industry or life in general."

## Working harder and smarter

Looking into 2023, the buzzword across survey respondents was *optimistic*—albeit with some uncertainty about how, exactly, stabilizing growth in comics will play out. Most retailers are comics fans themselves and are in it for the community. Peagler credits Heroes' "loyal customer base" as crucial to the store's success throughout constant changes within the industry. While other comics shops expand to product lines like gaming and toys, his focus continues to be "purely on comics." And new fans are born every day—literally.

Powerhouse's Jarvis celebrated young readers coming to the medium, saying she's a "big advocate for kids and their

HEROES AREN'T HARD TO FIND

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desire to read graphic novels," describing comics as "an amazing tool for deeper or more challenging themes that might be too intense when written as a prose chapter book."

Potential new fans are everywhere. That's why King believes that part of the comics industry's continued growth needs to come from outside the traditional channels. "The industry is going to have to work smarter and harder to optimize its reach to new customers," she says. "We can go to comic conventions and other related events, but those are already our customer base. We have started an initiative on our end to try and expose other potential customers to our products."

This effort finds Space Cadets attending and setting up market at all kinds of collector and fan events, in addition to the usual comics conventions. The hope is to discover crossover customers among collectors, whether they're coming together at horror conventions or craft shows. Fandoms are larger and more disparate than ever, and King hopes to tap into their passion.

Hemming describes the popularity of comics as "a bit of a double-edged sword." He's been thrilled about the way recent industry-wide successes have resulted in the return of out-of-print comics, more risk taking among publishers, smaller publishers getting more shine, and an increased array of translated comics coming from other countries. But it's also "led to a glut of mediocre comics," he says.

Brower hedged when asked about the future. He's concerned about recent decisions made by publishers, including cover price increases, less across-the-board promotion, and the release of more product with no clear audience. While he's certain "the medium of comics is never going away," he finds himself unsure about where comics—particularly direct-market serials—are headed. "I know they're not going anywhere, but I think we'll see several fewer publishers making single-issue comics by the end of the year," he adds.

The opportunity and challenge for comics going forward is summed up by Haines, an expert in both the micro and macro trends of the industry, in her dual roles as shop owner and at ComicsPRO. She recognizes that there are issues that need to be addressed, but she knows that these also present opportunities—ones that could result in growth. "I truly believe our best year is ahead of us," she says of 2023, "as we adjust to the changes and work more closely together as a whole on what every single person working in comics wants: a stronger, better industry." ■

*A diverse set of comics genres on display at Space Cadets.*

*Comics fans gather in Charlotte, N.C., where superhero titles still fly off shelves at the shop Heroes Aren't Hard to Find.*

---

*David Harper runs the subscription comic book site Sktchd and is the host of* Off Panel, *a weekly comics interview podcast.*

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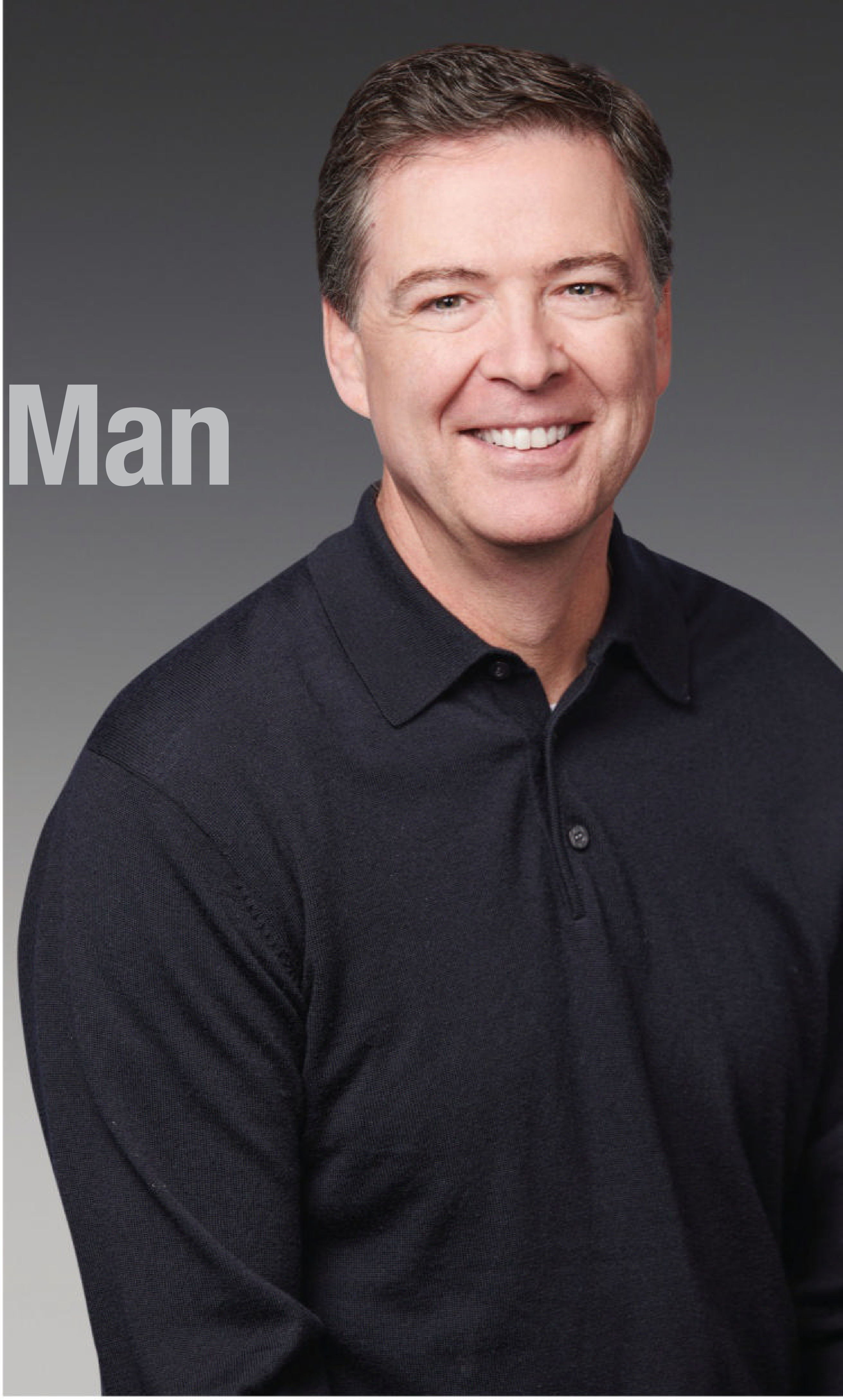
# Inside Man

## James Comey is throwing another curveball: he's a crime novelist now



©COURTESY OF JAMES COMEY

By Jonathan Segura

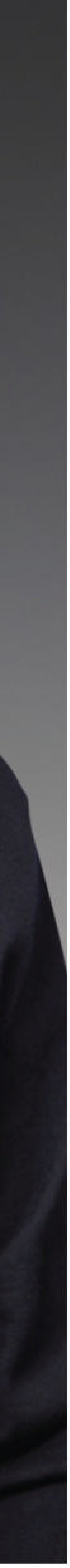
“Most of my life is like, *how did I end up here?*”

That's James Comey talking—a guy who has prosecuted the New York mob, been one of the eight human beings in history to run the FBI, held *that* press conference in October 2016, was a certain ex-president's favored Twitter punching bag for a time, and now, as he speaks, is sitting in a conference room at the Janklow & Nesbit office in Midtown Manhattan discussing *Central Park West*, a kaleidoscopic crime novel he wrote involving the Mafia and the murder of a former New York governor. Mysterious Press is sending it out into the world in May.

So, yeah, not a common career trajectory, but this latest unexpected twist, adding novelist to his CV, is one the 62-year-old is all in on. At the Janklow offices, he's dressed like he's ready for his author photo shoot, having traded the sober suit-and-tie combo for a dark green blazer, gray sweater, jeans, and sneakers. There's a brightness about him, and he's much more animated than his podium performances of the past would suggest. He's almost downright smiley as he makes it known that this whole novel thing isn't a lark. “This isn't stamp collecting or something,” he says. “This is what I want my living to be.”

This isn't Comey's first time at the publishing rodeo. His 2018 memoir, *A Higher Loyalty*, was a bestseller and relentless headline generator, and its 2021 follow-up, *Saving Justice*, took a longer view of his career in law enforcement and how the Justice Department operates. Zack Wagman, Flatiron's editorial director, worked with Comey on both of those and is responsible for putting the fiction bug in his ear.

“He kept nudging me and nudging me and saying, ‘Look, someday you really ought to give it a shot. You could show people the worlds you're interested in through fiction in a really cool way,’ ” Comey says. “That sort of percolated and percolated,



and then I sat down to talk to my amazing spouse, who has great story vision. And she said, 'I wonder if you could do a story about New York, about the Mafia.' So I started working on baby steps, and I found it to be so fun, and so much harder than writing nonfiction, but it drew me in."

That was spring 2021, and Comey established a masochistic process of getting feedback (sometimes, he reports, "brutal" feedback) from his wife, Patrice, every morning based on what he'd written the day before. They'd have coffee, go over her notes, see which birds were hanging out by the bird feeders out back, and then he'd set up shop on his laptop and grind away until he ran out of steam. Some days he'd put his head down and look up and hours would have passed by. Other days were inert. But soon enough, a story came together, and Comey got hooked.

"I'm excited about this," he says. "This is what I want to do until I'm old and foolish. I don't know how people will react to it. I hope they like it. But it's a strange place to be in, doing something totally different, and caring whether it works or not. And that's also exciting, but it induces some nervousness."

It wouldn't take much imagination to picture the knives being especially out for this one (and if you really want to go somewhere dark, imagine the venom coming from anonymous online reviewers), but the truth is: the book works. It's solid and convincing, and its secret sauce is the lived-in details that can only come from someone familiar with those five steps leading up from Centre Street to the grim "Soviet-looking" Manhattan courthouse where criminal trials are heard. There's the drab, leak-prone offices federal prosecutors toil in; the impossibility of getting a lunch order delivered, since their building's address isn't agreed upon; the opulence of some halls of justice, the linoleum glory of others; and the vagaries of life as an up-and-coming assistant U.S. attorney.

This latter bit comes courtesy of the character Nora Carleton. She's a single mom; lives in Hoboken, N.J.; and is a pro at hitting the sales to piece together a wardrobe befitting someone representing the nation in court. As the novel opens, Nora's working a mob case with a cooperating witness. In another courtroom nearby, Kyra Burke stands accused of murdering her estranged husband, former New York governor Tony Burke, who had covered himself in #MeToo shame. The reader knows from the prologue that Kyra's innocent and was framed, but it's up to her very expensive defense attorney to prove it.

The two cases converge after Nora's witness is found dead in the trunk of a car, two bullet holes in his forehead and his mouth full of canary feathers. Benny Dugan, a full-on *youse guise* federal investigator who makes former Brooklyn borough president Marty Markowitz sound like Morgan Freeman, helps stitch it all together—who really killed Tony, and how it happened.

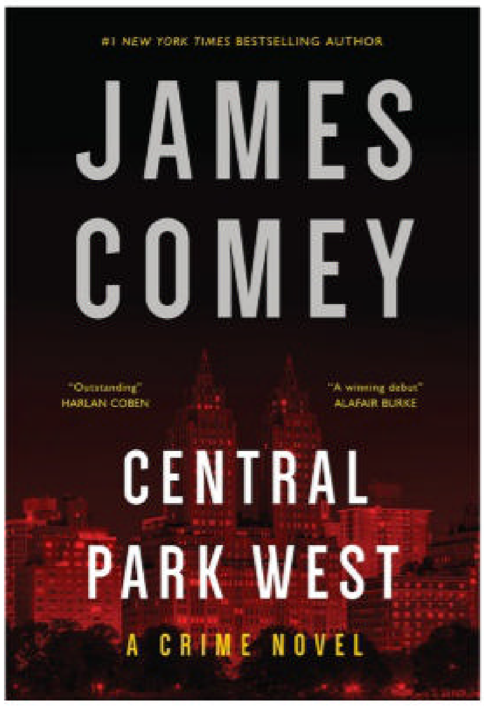
Which is to say, Comey's had his hands on the real-world versions of all these moving parts. That experience shows, and the trick became the classic fiction writer's dilemma of showing, not telling. Patrice helped with some of this, as did Comey's agent, Janklow & Nesbit's Kirby Kim, who sold the book to mystery legend Otto Penzler's Mysterious Press on a partial and proposal.

"When I first met Otto," Comey says, "I said to him, 'One of the challenges of becoming a prominent person is it's hard to get people to tell you the truth.' When I was FBI director, it was something I obsessed about, because everybody dressed up when they came to see me, they stood up when I came in the room, but are they really going to tell me when I suck? And Otto said, 'No problem! You have come to the right place.' Doing a crime novel with Otto as your editor—that, to me, is a dream. But part of the dream is, he will blast you when you need blasting."

Mysterious Press editor-in-chief Luisa Cruz Smith was the other member of what Comey calls his "dream team."

"Louisa's knife is every bit as sharp as Otto's, but it comes in at a more oblique angle," Comey says. "That's kind of cool when you have two people like that coming at you. With feedback, my first reaction is, just tell me it's great. And then, when they don't, it's like, thank God they didn't blow smoke at me."

If the stars line up for this one—they are starting to, with a murderer's row of blurbers having blurbed and an eight-city U.S. tour planned—it could mark the beginning of a very long run. Comey's just wrapped up a draft of a second novel in a planned trilogy. That would be the first of three series—one set in and around New York, then D.C., then Richmond, Va. There might even be a fourth one in there, in Chicago.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Minutes before sitting down to talk, Comey saw his ARCs for the first time. He's got one in his hand, sort of sizing it up, and you can actually see it sinking in: the realization that this very long path he's mapped out in his heart is materializing.

"I've always loved bookstores," Comey says. "This may sound weird, but it's the way they smell. I haven't done this recently, but I did it many times after *A Higher Loyalty* was published—I'd go in and find my book, sign it, and slip it back on the shelf, or sign a bunch of them and slip them back on the shelf. And so I have that same flashback: this will be in bookstores, and I will travel around, which is fun, and see it. But it's so different from my identity in a way. With *Higher Loyalty*, that's about government, and that's kind of who I am. This is an identity I haven't fully adjusted to yet. And so I picture it on the shelves, and I don't know how that'll feel." ■

# Reviews

## Fiction

### ★ Homebodies

**Tembe Denton-Hurst.** Harper, $30 (320p)
ISBN 978-0-06-327428-0

Denton-Hurst debuts with an exciting chronicle of a Black journalist finding her voice. Mickey Hayward, a writer for a magazine called *Wave*, is disappointed by her supervisor's casual racism and dismissiveness toward her ideas. Still, she believes she'll find success, until she discovers that *Wave* is interviewing candidates to replace her, and she's laid off shortly after someone is hired. Angry and reeling from being let go and a fight with her long-term girlfriend, Mickey posts a letter online describing her mistreatment at *Wave*, then returns to her Maryland hometown where she reconnects with ex-lover Tee and strives to be honest with her family about her struggles. Things are especially fraught with her father, with whom she's built a fragile relationship after he started a new family following his divorce from Mickey's mom. But her visit is cut short when an industry-wide reckoning with the exploitation of Black employees thrusts Mickey's letter turned manifesto into the spotlight, and with it, Mickey herself. Denton-Hurst dazzles with her stirring indictment of racism in media and its insidious effects on Mickey, who must choose between making herself smaller to appease others and championing her own voice and experiences. Emotionally and politically resonant, this is not to be missed. *(May)*

### The Guest

**Emma Cline.** Random House, $28 (304p)
ISBN 978-0-8129-9862-7

A 22-year-old woman loses her apartment and her grip on reality in the provocative latest from Cline (*The Girls*). After Alex's sex work dries up, she gets kicked out of her place in New York City and takes up the offer from Simon, an affluent older man, to spend the summer in the Hamptons. All goes well until a week before Simon's Labor Day party, when Alex dings his car, and Simon suggests she head back to the city. Hoping to preserve what luster she can in Simon's eyes, she doesn't mention she has nowhere to go and convinces herself she'll be welcome at his party. She then launches a series of schemes to get through the next five days, taking advantage of strangers' assumptions that she belongs. As Alex wanders from a rental full of hard partiers to a pool house on property left vacant for renovations, she draws on her sex work skills to keep herself welcome and leaves a trail of destruction. Before the first couple days are out, she's slept with another girl's boyfriend and damaged a blue-chip painting, while holding out hope, however misguided, that Simon will be happy to see her again. Cline has a keen eye for class differences and makes Alex into an intriguing protagonist who has learned to be observant, but must also recognize she's losing her judgment if she wants to survive. Like watching a car crash, this is hard to look away from. *Agent: Bill Clegg, Clegg Agency. (May)*

© MARTIN HICKEY

*A barman deals with heartache and financial problems in Mary Beth Keane's* The Half Moon *(reviewed on this page).*

### The Half Moon

**Mary Beth Keane.** Scribner, $28 (304p)
ISBN 978-1-982172-60-2

Keane (*Ask Again, Yes*) takes a nuanced look at a troubled marriage during a fraught week of blizzards and power outages in a predominantly Irish New York City suburb. "Handsome and charming" Malcolm Gephardt, 45, finally recognizes that "middle age is looming," and that the Half Moon, the bar he owns, is in dire straits. His wife, Jess, an attorney, left him several months earlier, having been worn out by seven years of failed fertility treatments and discouraged by Malcolm's refusal to include her in financial decisions. He has held out hope that Jess will come back, until he learns she's involved with a fellow lawyer who has three young children. Keane surrounds her main characters with a crew of nosy people who regularly check in on Malcolm ("Part of him suspected these friends, grown men, all in their mid-forties, loved the excuse to leave their families on a Saturday afternoon"), and livens the proceedings with juicy subplots about a shady loan with terms enforced by even shadier goons, the mysterious disappearance of a bar patron, and Malcolm's mother, who, unbeknownst to Malcolm, has been carrying on an affair with the neighbor who plows her driveway. Keane pulls off a quiet, contemplative novel about the dwindling time for second chances. *Agent: Chris Calhoun, Chris Calhoun Agency. (May)*

### ★ Good Night, Irene

**Luis Alberto Urrea.** Little, Brown, $29 (336p)
ISBN 978-0-316-26585-0

Urrea (*The House of Broken Angels*) transports readers to the Western Front of WWII in his stunning latest. Irene Woodward, a tough New Yorker, covers up the bruises received from her abusive fiancé with concealer and sweaters, throws her engagement ring down the drain, and joins America's war effort as a member of the Red Cross Clubmobile. Tasked with high expectations—keep driving and keep smiling—Irene is sent to England alongside Dorothy Dunford, who, much like Irene, is looking for an escape from her life. The two become fast friends while serving coffee and doughnuts and trying to comfort the soldiers, a nebulous task defined in the chaste terms of the day (they should act like a "big sister, girl next door, mom or sweetheart"). As the U.S. efforts advance, Irene fears she has lost Dorothy, who's become like a sister, after they are separated in an accident; eventually, she goes home to New York to rebuild a life marred with survivor's guilt and shell shock. In a move that could feel contrived but only further elevates the work, Urrea bookends the wrenching narrative with a surprising discovery 50 years later. It's a moving and graceful tribute to friendship and to heroic women who have shouldered the burdens of war. *Agent: Julie Barer, Book Group. (May)*

### Your Love Is Not Good

**Johanna Hedva.** And Other Stories, $27 (320p) ISBN 978-1-913505-66-0

Hedva (*On Hell*) paints an unsettling if messy portrait of a queer biracial artist reckoning with the ways whiteness pervades her work and desires. Born to a Korean father and a white mother, the unnamed narrator has become "bitter about being neither one total thing nor the other." In trying to come to terms with her complex identity, she develops a masochistic infatuation with a wealthy Iranian art student who "act[s] like a white girl," and hires a Japanese Korean dominatrix for "antihumiliation" services. As a white-passing painter, the narrator wonders if her "self-portraits count as portraits of a white person." Later, she meets a beautiful white woman whom she refers to as "The Twin" at a party and enlists her as a model. Success takes her and her new muse from L.A. to Berlin, but after a Black artist calls for a boycott of commercial art galleries, she reexamines her aspirations. Loosely structured around various artistic concepts (sections are headed with definitions of *chiaroscuro*, *sfumato*, etc.), the narrative itself is a bit disjointed, but Hedva's bold brushstrokes give readers a clear view into her protagonist's mind and heart. Though the various parts don't quite cohere into a satisfying narrative, Hedva is consistently savvy and surprising on the page. *Agent: Clare Mao, Europa Content. (May)*

### The Three of Us

**Ore Agbaje-Williams.** Putnam, $25 (192p) ISBN 978-0-593-54071-8

In Agbaje-Williams's intoxicating debut, a Nigerian housewife's protective husband and freewheeling best friend vie for her loyalty and affection over the course of a single day. The unnamed wife grapples with the prospect of pregnancy, which she sees as a "ritual performed out

## [Q&A]

### *PW* TALKS WITH LUIS ALBERTO URREA

## A Ballad for Unsung Heroes

Urrea draws on his family history for *Good Night, Irene* (Little, Brown, May; reviewed on p. 30), about the women of the American Red Cross's Clubmobile service in WWII.

*Good Night, Irene* is dedicated to your mother, Phyllis de Urrea, who served as crew on a Red Cross Clubmobile in WWII. In what ways did she inspire the novel?

The entire book echoes her physical journey and all of the major events are based on her actual experiences. I wanted to give my mother a monument. She had her war chest in the apartment where I grew up. She didn't ever want me to open it, but you can't tell that to a boy. Fortunately and unfortunately, when I was in third grade, I opened the chest and found photographs from Buchenwald. Working on this book really defined my mom to me. [The character] Dorothy is based on my mother's best friend, Jill. When I sat down with Miss Jill, she said, "I drove the truck, your mother brought the joy." I felt like I knew my mom, but I did not know that mom. They were winning the war and having a wild adventure, until it turned to hell. My mother was pushed past her breaking point and plagued by nightmares and collapsed into her horrors. *Good Night, Irene* was my way to give my mother a happy ending. That was my plan the whole time, to reconcile her pain.

© JOE MAZZA, BRAVE-LUX

Why did this book feel important to write now?

This one snuck up on me, and I don't know if I intended to write it. Partially it was my wife; she is a journalist and said, "Wait, what? Donut Dollies?!" They were completely forgotten. They were just there to make the boys feel good. One detail that just astonished me was that the Clubmobilers were trained to forget. They didn't know where they were going. They had no orders but to serve. When they came back, the building that kept their records burnt down, and eventually our culture stopped remembering. It was a history of attrition.

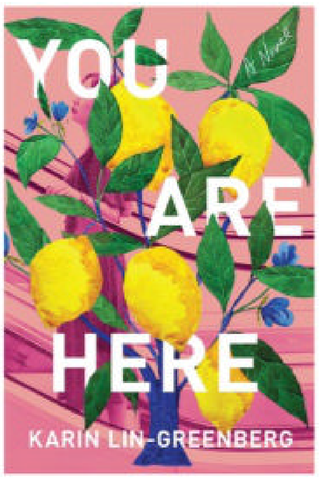
You've been quoted as saying, "I am more interested in bridges, not borders." Could you tell me about how this story seeks to unite?

To see the response from early readers has been really moving. People have known about it, and what is really interesting is that veterans will tell me something they've never told their family. Families have found out what they never knew. There need to be women heroes—this has always been a thing in my work. I'm answerable to women. To know that the records of at least 120 women were erased, I just couldn't bear it.

—COLLEEN WHITE

## ★ You Are Here

**Karin Lin-Greenberg.** Counterpoint, $27 (304p) ISBN 978-1-64009-543-4



Lin-Greenberg's exceptional debut novel (after the collection *Vanished*) explores a complex web of relationships at a fading mall in Albany, N.Y. Among the people drawn together by the mall are Tina Huang, the last remaining stylist at a struggling hair salon, and Ro Goodson, an 89-year-old white woman who is Tina's only regular customer, and who Tina believes comes in because she's lonely. Ro takes a dim view of her Black neighbor Joan for moving into Ro's predominantly white neighborhood years earlier. Ro also doesn't think much of Joan's daughter, Gwen, an adjunct professor, or Gwen's white husband, Kevin, manager of the mall's bookstore, both of whom live in a tiny house on Joan's property. Maria, a high school senior who hopes to become a professional actor, dons a chicken outfit for her food court job and is upset when she doesn't get a lead part in her school's production of *West Side Story*. The other characters are past worrying their dreams won't come true; Tina secretly yearns to be an illustrator of children's books but "knows it's not a practical thing to pursue," while Ro plants a lemon tree that she knows won't bear fruit until after she's gone. After establishing a quirky tone, the novel's third act reaches a grand scale as an active shooter prowls the mall, though the real drama rests in the characters' reckoning with the limits of what is possible. This is a remarkable study of ordinary people's extraordinary inner lives. *Agent: Kathy Schneider, Jane Rotrosen Agency. (May)*

of responsibility rather than desire." Her dilemma is complicated by a visit from her childhood best friend, Temi. Back in college, the self-seeking and brash Temi coaxed her friend out of her shell of reticence and fear, but in the meantime her conservative husband, also unnamed, has led her into a traditional gender role. Temi fears her friend is regressing into a "woman who is silent and subservient," and the husband, of course, has grown tired of Temi's presence and wants to start a family. The narrative unfolds as a triptych, each character helming a section from their point of view to wondrous and wearying effects as they retell and relitigate the same events. There's not much of a plot, though it's delicious to watch the characters' long-fermenting tensions come to the fore. It lands as a discerning debut from an author who knows a thing or two (or three) about the ever-shifting dynamics of intimacy. *(May)*

### Uranians

**Theodore McCombs.** Astra House, $25 (224p) ISBN 978-1-66260-194-1

McComb weaves science and fantasy in his playful and provocative debut collection. In the opener, "Toward a Theory of Alternative Lifestyles," the narrator reflects on a prior relationship in terms of quantum mechanics ("If it's true that… every possible version of you exists somewhere… in at least one of those realities… you got everything you ever wanted, and were loved as much as you loved"). In "Lacuna Heights," set in a near-future San Francisco where the beaches are gone and people wear Wi-Fi glasses, a lawyer begins to disassociate as he questions his marriage. "Six Hangings in the Land of Unkillable Women" counterpoints brief accounts of 1909 executions with the grim dystopian mission of a police superintendent's wife to bring back public hangings. The main event is the glorious novella "Uranians," which takes its name from a Victorian term for queer people. Somewhere in space, the opera *La Traviata* is performed on a spaceship, its motley mix of passengers on a mission to study other planets. On board, a trans priest lusts after a "power lesbian" doctor. Though not all of the concepts take off, McCombs's mix of heart and zany ideas is often reminiscent of George Saunders. Readers will find plenty of earthy and unearthly delights. *Agent: Kirby Kim, Janklow & Nesbit Assoc. (May)*

### Back to the Dirt

**Frank Bill.** Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $18 trade paper (336p) ISBN 978-0-374-53443-1

Bill's feverish latest (after *The Savage*) shines a light on an American heartland blighted by crushed dreams and debilitating addictions. Among the working-class characters in Corydon, Ind., is Miles Knox, a 57-year-old Vietnam vet who works in the local paint-additive factory in the early 2000s. Miles is so haunted by memories of war that he converses with dead buddies as though they're still alive and guzzles steroids to keep those thoughts at bay. Miles's much younger girlfriend, Shelby McCutchen, works as a stripper and looks after her twin brother,

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Wylie, who's addicted to Oxycontin. Wylie's supplier, Bedford Timberlake, has just died, and Bedford's ex-cop brother, Nathaniel, thinks Wylie killed him. The paths of these and numerous others converge over the course of a gore-spattered and drug-laced day of reckoning, as Nathaniel sets out to get revenge for Bedford's death. Bill refracts the events through a variety of viewpoints, with some of the characters so compromised by drugs that the story turns surreal. With kinetic prose, Bill keeps up the pace and delivers a steady supply of grisly details (a dead man laid out on a floor is "smeared like a dream one couldn't recollect, being delivered in fragments and knots of bone and red to a parched mind"). It makes for one hell of a ride. *(May)*

### At the Edge of the Woods

**Kathryn Bromwich.** Two Dollar Radio, $18.95 trade paper (176p) ISBN 978-1-953387-31-8

In Bromwich's subtle debut, set in an unspecified period with horse-drawn carriages, a middle-aged woman leaves everything behind to live in the woods. Laura Mantovani resides in a secluded cabin outside an Italian village, where she ekes out a quiet existence, translating and tutoring on behalf of the locals, and falling into a diffident romance with a dashing waiter named Vincenzo. Then, after Laura's friend Héloïse unexpectedly visits, the reader learns Héloïse had helped Laura escape her domineering husband, Julien. After Héloïse departs, and with Vincenzo aloof, Laura becomes overwhelmed by her isolation. Increasingly dependent on laudanum and subject to strange, visionary fevers, she yields to a madness that opens her to the allure of the forest, "no longer beholden to the chains and responsibilities of man, but to the perfect harmony of the natural world, where everything has its place, and no rock or broken twig is without purpose." Peril eventually arrives in the form of dangerous wolves and even more dangerous hunters, but the developments will come too late for many readers. It's a slow burn, though it works as a fine portrait of a woman's communion with an untamed wilderness. *Agent: Matthew Turner, RCW Literary. (May)*

### ★ The Wishing Game

**Meg Shaffer.** Ballantine, $28 (304p) ISBN 978-0-593-59883-2

Shaffer blends tragedy and triumph in a whimsical and gratifying debut about what makes a family. At 13, Lucy Hart ran away from home to escape neglectful parents, wishing instead to live with Jack Masterson—the bestselling author of her favorite children's books, the Clock Island series—on the real-life counterpart to Clock Island. That dream didn't pan out. Now, 13 years later, she's a kindergarten teacher's aide desperate to adopt seven-year-old Christopher Lamb, an orphaned former student of hers, but she needs more money and greater stability in order to make it happen. Hugo Reese, Jack's illustrator and surrogate son, is concerned when Jack abruptly comes out of a six-year retirement to invite Lucy and three other former runaways and superfans to Clock Island, where they'll compete for the only copy of a brand new Clock Island book. Jack puts the contestants through a series of challenges and riddles designed to mimic the adventures in his books, and along the way, readers will come to root for all four to succeed—and for Hugo and Lucy to fall in love. Shaffer doesn't shy away from the darkness in her characters' backstories even as she delivers childlike wonder in spades. This is wish fulfilment in the best way. *Agent: Amy Tannenbaum, Jane Rotrosen Agency. (May)*

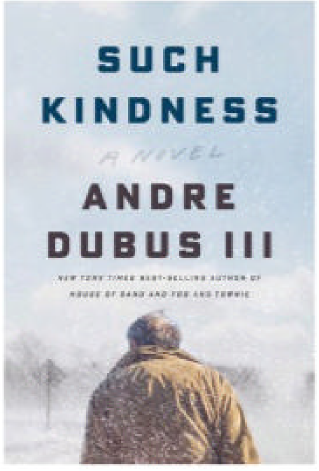
### The Old Lion

**Jeff Shaara.** St. Martin's, $30 (448p) ISBN 978-1-250-27994-1

Shaara (*The Eagle's Claw*) delivers a ponderous narrative of Theodore Roosevelt. In December 1918, a 60-year-old Roosevelt is near the end of his life, and with his decline exacerbated by news that his son Quentin perished in WWI, he agrees to a final set of interviews with his biographer, Hermann Hagedorn. Shaara then flashes back to 1868 New York City, as the nine-year-old "Teedie" struggles with asthma. His father implores him to toughen up, and he goes on to become an accomplished boxer, Harvard graduate

## ★ Such Kindness

**Andre Dubus III.** Norton, $30 (320p) ISBN 978-1-324-00046-4



Dubus (*Gone So Long*) returns with a heartrending account of one man's desperate quest to retain his sense of goodness under the long shadow of the financial crisis. Fifty-four-year-old carpenter Tom Lowe is near rock bottom. Before the housing crash of 2008, Tom had taken out an adjustable-rate mortgage to finance the construction of a home for his wife and young son. But ballooning mortgage payments, a roofing accident, and a painkiller addiction left him broke in more ways than one. Now, he's divorced and living alone in subsidized housing. He wants to visit his son, Drew, at college in Amherst, but his car gets impounded for expired plates. To get it back, he begrudgingly lists his carpentry tools for sale on Craigslist, but someone steals them first. The nonlinear narrative of Tom's ups and downs finds him at one point entertaining a scheme cooked up by his neighbor and only friend, Trina, to steal the credit cards of an elderly woman in their complex, but Tom waffles, earning sour looks from Trina and leading to more soul-searching on his part. As in Dubus's previous work, the author poignantly portrays his protagonist's search for redemption, and shows how precarious situations can make people especially vulnerable. There's a natural free association to the prose, with Tom's stray thoughts generally leading him to regrets over "reach[ing] for more" than a "two room life," or wistful memories of Drew before the family fell apart. This is a stirring addition to Dubus's formidable oeuvre. *(June)* magna cum laude, author of an acclaimed book on the War of 1812, New York City police commissioner, Spanish-American war hero, and politician. He deals with personal tragedies along the way, most notably the deaths on the same day in 1884 of his mother and his first wife, the former by a severe case of typhoid fever and the latter of complications after delivering their child, causing Roosevelt to feel as if his life has become a "cruel nightmare." Shaara occasionally returns to the bedside dialogues with Hagedorn, but these scenes often feel as strained as his stricken subject, whose responses to the biographer's questions are prefaced by stock reactions like "ill-disguised annoyance" and "a long, painful breath." Despite the richness of the source material, this is a bit of a slog. *(May)*

### Paper Roses on Stony Mountain

**Diana Stevan.** Island House, $17.95 e-book (358p) ISBN 978-1-988180-09-0

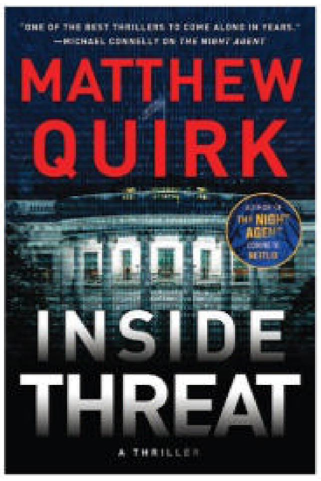
Stevan wraps up the Lukia's Family Saga trilogy (after *Lilacs in the Dust Bowl*) with an impressive story of a Ukrainian family's fortitude and trials in Canada. In 1929 widow Lukia Mazurec leaves Ukraine for Manitoba with her adult children. As Hitler captures Austria, Lukia, who has a brother in the Carpathians, fears the impact of yet another war while trying to keep their farm afloat on the other side of the planet. Lukia's oldest, Egnat, works the land to provide for his wife and young daughters, though he fights frequently with his brother, Mike, who spends more time drinking than working. Lukia's daughter, Dolly, has fallen in love with Peter Klewchuk, whom Lukia disapproves of because he has few prospects. Still, Dolly and Peter marry and attempt to build their own house, but the ground freezes before they can finish digging and they move to Winnipeg to find work. Though Lukia feels abandoned when all her children except Mike leave, she continues farming despite her loneliness, finally deciding to move in with Dolly and Peter to help care for their young child. Stevan's strong characters are the standouts here, with their resilience in the face of ceaseless hardships. Historical fiction fans will want to have a look. *(Self-published)*

## Mystery/Thriller

### ★ Inside Threat

**Matthew Quirk.** Morrow, $28.99 (432p) ISBN 978-0-063-05168-3

Quirk (*Red Warning*) returns to the world of the U.S. Secret Service in this page-turning thriller. Secret Service agent Eric Hill, stuck on temporary desk duty after a physical confrontation with a cabinet official, is fed up with D.C. politics and contemplating retirement. Meanwhile, rumors swirl of Operation V, either a seditious conspiracy to remove the president from office or the president's own plot to wield totalitarian power. After an assassination attempt at the White House is foiled by Hill and rookie agent Amber Cody, the president and his inner circle are dispatched to a Cold War-era bunker in Pennsylvania. But rather than escaping from danger, Hill realizes they've barricaded themselves in with their attackers. Quirk masterfully ramps up the tension and paranoia as the body count rises, agents turn on each other, and Hill tries to suss out who is the greater threat: the traitors or the man he has sworn to protect. The breakneck pace never flags, and the interplay between Hill's world-weary cynicism and Cody's institutional confidence is a delight. Readers will be eager for a sequel. *Agent: Dan Conaway, Writers House. (June)*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### Tom Clancy's Op-Center: Fallout

**Jeff Rovin.** Griffin, $19 trade paper (336p) ISBN 978-1-2508-6872-5

Rovin's 19th Op-Center series entry (following 2021's *The Black Order*) checks all the customary boxes, if mutedly. Things kick off after a Chinese space station destroys a manned American spacecraft, killing everyone on board, and the Op-Center, now codenamed Black Wasp, has been whittled down to five members by a multitude of enemies. The space massacre is revenge for a Black Wasp mission a year earlier in which Lt. Grace Lee abducted Yang Dayou, the chief engineer of a Chinese hypersonic missile program, and his family, and assassinated the project director. Soon, Chinese forces reduce Black Wasp's numbers even further, and Grace endures a terrible personal blow. Readers will be pleased that the ending points to a possible new structure for the Op-Center series and a return to the exceptional action of past missions, but this feels more like a placeholder than full-bore thriller. Only Clancy diehards need apply. *(May)*

### Rehearsed to Death: A Domestic Partners in Crime Mystery

**Frank Anthony Polito.** Kensington, $16.95 trade paper (288p) ISBN 978-1-4967-3560-7

The loquacious PJ Penwell, YA author and cohost of the popular home renovation series *Domestic Partners* with his sweetheart, JP Broadway, returns in the easygoing follow-up to 2022's *Renovated to Death*. PJ and JP live in an idyllic, fictional Detroit suburb that boasts "the seventh-highest rate of same-sex couples nationwide," where PJ (who also happens to be an unproduced playwright) is thrilled by a request from the local community theater to produce his magnum opus, *Blue Tuesday*. Then he encounters the arrogant Xander Sherwood Deva, who has been brought in to direct the show. When Deva turns up dead, it becomes clear that a long list of locals might have cause for the crime. Polito pads his exceedingly thin plot with some entertaining diversions, including one about introducing a second dog to the Penwell-Broadway household and another following the couple as they scope out a new renovation project for their TV series. The mystery is exceptionally simple to solve, but for readers seeking a quick read for a train journey or a bedside book on vacation, this fits the bill. *(May)*

### Viviana Valentine Goes Up the River: A Girl Friday Mystery

**Emily J. Edwards.** Crooked Lane, $26.99 (288p) ISBN 978-1-63910-268-6

In Edwards's second outing for Viviana Valentine (after 2022's *Viviana Valentine Gets Her Man*), the spunky former watch thief has become a partner at Tommy Fortuna's PI firm in 1950 Hell's Kitchen. Things kick off when Valentine and Fortuna are invited to a house party at the Tarrytown, N.Y., mansion of scientist Buster Beacon, who complains of spooky noises on the premises. It's a thin pretense for dragging the two private eyes out of the city, but soon one of the house guests is poisoned, and a blizzard leaves everyone snowed in, with nearly every guest harboring a potential murder motive or illicit secret. Throughout, Valentine's voice shifts puzzlingly from polished and proper to slangy, but much of the dialogue is quick and witty, and the mansion is a delightfully rendered setting, full of hidden passages and strange scientific devices. Fans of Susan Elia MacNeal's Maggie Hope or Jacqueline Winspear's Maisie Dobbs will want to give this a try. *Agent: Anne Tibbets, Donald Maass Literary. (May)*

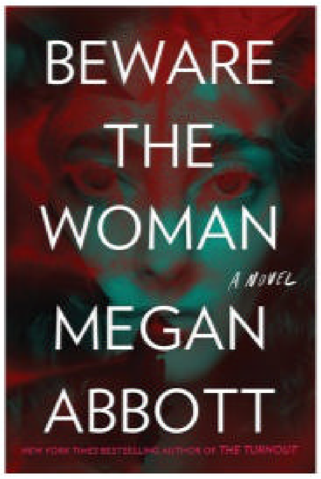
## Bad, Bad Seymour Brown

**Susan Isaacs.** Atlantic Monthly, $28 (400p) ISBN 978-0-8021-5906-9

Early in Isaacs's winning second outing for Corie Geller (after 2019's *Takes One to Know One*), the former FBI agent's father, retired NYPD detective Daniel Schottland, reconnects with April Brown, whose parents died in an arson when she was five years old. Though Schottland and his colleagues never identified the arsonist, they assumed the target was April's father, Seymour, who laundered money for the Russian mob. April—now a Rutgers University film professor obsessed with old movies—reports to Schottland that an SUV with obscured plates attempted to run her down on the school's campus. Local authorities dismiss any connection to April's childhood attack, but she remains unconvinced. Desperate for an escape from their "unremittingly suburban" routines and hoping to forestall another attempt on April's life, Schottland and Corie set up an ad hoc PI office in the Gellers's Long Island McMansion and start digging into Seymour's sordid past. Offbeat characters, witty narration, and a winsome father-daughter dynamic complement Isaacs's clever if madcap plot. Fans of breezy suspense will be delighted. *Agent: Richard Pine, InkWell Management. (May)*

## ★ Beware the Woman

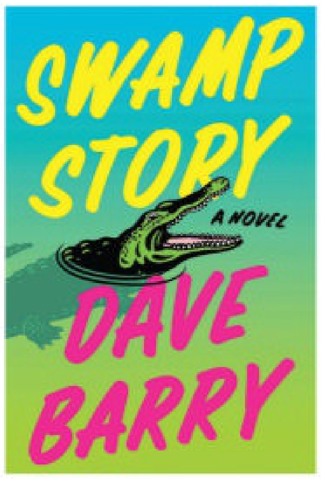
**Megan Abbott.** Putnam, $28 (304p) ISBN 978-0-593-08493-9



In this spine-tingling suspense yarn from Edgar Award winner Abbott (*The Turnout*), pregnant second grade teacher Jacy learns there's plenty she still doesn't know about her taciturn artist husband Jed or the family he rarely mentions—maybe a dangerous amount. The action unfolds during the couple's summer road trip from New York City to visit Jed's father, a retired physician, at his cottage on Michigan's remote Upper Peninsula. At first, Jacy feels transported by the surroundings and her father-in-law's near-courtly solicitousness. (His brusque caretaker, Mrs. Brandt, is a different story.) But things shift when Jacy has a miscarriage scare and, in the aftermath, Jed aligns with his father's alarmingly old-school notions about women and pregnancy. Rightly or wrongly, Jacy starts to feel like a prisoner. Manipulating the sense of menace like a virtuoso violinist, Abbott expertly foreshadows the wrenching family secrets that are exposed in a ferocious finale. Sinewy prose and note-perfect pacing make this a masterful and provocative deep dive into desire, love, and gender politics. Readers will be left breathless. *Agent: Dan Conaway, Writers House. (May)*

## ★ Swamp Story

**Dave Barry.** Simon & Schuster, $27.99 (336p) ISBN 978-1-9821-9133-7



Crime fiction doesn't come much funnier than this Florida-set caper from Barry (*Insane City*), in which a lucky find precipitates a cascade of unexpected consequences. Jesse Braddock lives in the Everglades with Willa, her baby daughter, and Slater, Willa's deadbeat father. She has little hope for a better life until she stumbles on a cache of gold bars, supposedly a buried Confederate Army payroll shipment. But the treasure has already captured the interest of some ex-cons who plotted to find it during their time in prison. Meanwhile, the enterprising owner of a local beer and bait shop concocts a harebrained get-rich-quick scheme: he employs a down-on-his-luck journalist to don a Dora the Explorer costume and pretend to be the mythical Everglades Melon Monster so he can lure tourists to the area in search of it. That scheme results in an influx of visitors at the very moment Braddock hopes to evade the treasure-seekers and make off with her life-changing fortune. Barry conducts the hijinks like a maestro of comic suspense. Carl Hiaasen fans will be in heaven. *Agent: Amy Berkower, Writers House. (May)*

## The Last Songbird

**Daniel Weizmann.** Melville House, $17.99 trade paper (336p) ISBN 978-1-68589-030-8

L.A. Lyft driver Addy Zantz, the narrator of this soulful first mystery from Weizmann (*Drinking with Bukowski*), is trying to reignite his songwriting career when one of his regular fares, aging music legend Annie Linden, is found dead on Hermosa Beach. Grief-stricken at the loss of not just his favorite passenger but his sole artistic supporter, Addy becomes ensnared in the investigation. Police charge Linden's recently fired former assistant with the singer's murder and pin Addy as an accessory. In an attempt to clear his name, Addy begins tracking down the people closest to Linden, including exes, lovers, and old mentors, hoping to unravel her complicated past and shine a light on her secrets before it's too late. Weizmann seamlessly weaves vibrant L.A. music industry personalities into the suspenseful plot. This tense whodunit deserves a sequel. *Agent: Janet Oshiro, Robbins Office. (May)*

## SF/Fantasy/Horror

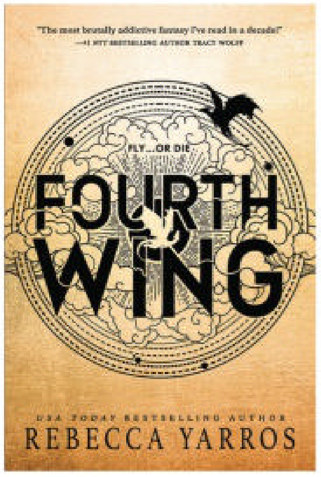
### Witch King

**Martha Wells.** Tordotcom, $28.99 (432p) ISBN 978-1-250-82679-4

Hugo, Nebula, and Locus award winner Wells takes a break from her sci-fi Murderbot series to delve into a complex secondary world fantasy exploring the past and present of Kaiisteron the Witch King, a demon in human form. The past story line follows Kai's first possession of a human body and his relationship with Prince Bashasa, who orchestrates a coup against the autocratic Hierarchs to avenge his sister's death. The present begins with Kai abruptly waking to find his consciousness separated from his body—which is now a corpse entombed in a watery prison—and setting out to investigate his own murder. Among those helping him are Ziede Daiyahah, a witch searching for her missing wife; Sanja, a street urchin; and Ramad, a vanguarder and historian. The enormous cast is difficult to keep track of and the dry, workmanlike prose that works so well when Wells is writing robots can make it difficult to feel particularly close to any of these living characters. Laudably, however, Wells treats sexuality and gender (demons can move between male and female bodies) with a refreshing matter-of-factness and depicts the cultures of this world with an anthropologist's care. Wells's long-awaited return to fantasy does not disappoint. *(May)*

### ★ Fourth Wing

**Rebecca Yarros.** Red Tower, $29.99 (512p) ISBN 978-1-64937-404-2



Romance author Yarros (*The Things We Leave Unfinished*) blends the epic tale of a reluctant dragon rider's coming-of-age with a sexy dark academia aesthetic in her astounding debut fantasy. Fearsome General Sorrengail demands that her children follow in her footsteps as dragon riders—even her youngest, Violet, who has trained her whole life to be a scribe like her late father. Forced to join a deadly war academy, Violet is unprepared to perform the fatal tasks all cadets must complete to become dragon riders. The odds are stacked against her due both to her delicate stature and to her mother's reputation: it was Sorrengail who gave the order to execute all separatists in the last rebellion. The rebels' orphaned children have all been conscripted to the academy, putting a target on Violet's back. Worse, her own brooding but handsome wing leader, third-year student Xaden Riorson, is the son of the separatists' leader. Meanwhile, the wards that protect the city are failing, but as danger draws nearer, clever Violet grows stronger, discovering that riding dragons may be her destiny after all. Yarros's worldbuilding is intricate without being overbearing, setting the stage for Violet's satisfying growth into a force to be reckoned with. Readers will be spellbound and eager for more. *Agent: Louise Fury, Bent Agency. (May)*

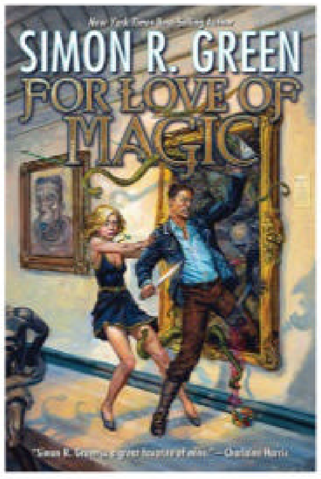
### The Lost War

**Justin Lee Anderson.** Orbit, $18.99 trade paper (480p) ISBN 978-0-316-45407-0

Anderson (*Carpet Diem*) effectively uses the perennial fantasy trope of a group of disparate characters on a vital mission in the gripping epic that launches his Eidyn Saga series. The kingdom of Eidyn has just survived a brutal conflict, but instead of enjoying peace, its monarch, King Janaeus, faces tense domestic challenges: a virulent plague may have mutated; demons who were summoned by Janaeus's imprisoned adversary, Mynygogg, remain at large; and violent scavengers known as Reivers pose a threat to unarmed civilians. In the midst of this turmoil, the monarch tasks Aranok, a magician serving as his envoy, to rescue Taneitheia, the deposed queen of nearby Gaulle, from a revolt, hoping that she will ally herself with Eidyn. Aranok assembles a motley crew for the mission, including a soldier, a naval captain, a White Thorn warrior, a priest, and a blacksmith—but as their expedition grows increasingly dangerous, he wonders who among them he can trust. Anderson's talent at crafting memorable characters will whet appetites for the sequel. Raymond Feist fans will be especially enthralled. *(May)*

### For Love of Magic

**Simon R. Green.** Baen, $25 (240p) ISBN 978-1-982192-61-7



Green (*Jekyll & Hyde, Inc.*) sticks to what he does best in this fun but familiar urban fantasy. As the current Outsider, it's Jack Daimon's job to protect humanity by "defusing the supernatural equivalent of unexploded bombs: all the weird artefacts and infernal devices left behind by forgotten civilisations." When his latest mission leads him to rescue innocent bystanders who've been sucked into a cursed painting, he meets the sultry, enigmatic Amanda Fielding, who is soon revealed as a supernatural being with a special agenda. She explains that the world's secret magical history was overwritten long ago, and she wants Jack to help restore things to their original state. What follows is a madcap journey through the greatest hits of English mythology, with Jack interacting with such figures as King Arthur, Robin Hood, and Beowulf while battling the stuff of modern conspiracy theories, including Men in Black and alien Greys. Given the focus on archetype and myth, it's fitting that Jack and Amanda inhabit Green's own fondly revisited protagonist templates: the highly competent man and frighteningly powerful woman who develop unshakable chemistry while facing impossible odds. Frenetic, snappy, and action-packed, this is a crowd-pleaser that doesn't ask too much from readers. *Agent: Joshua A. Bilmes, JABberwocky Literary. (May)*

### Bang Bang Bodhisattva

**Aubrey Wood.** Solaris, $26.99 (400p) ISBN 978-1-78618-701-7

This voicey and fast-paced cyberpunk noir, Wood's debut, follows transgender gig worker and jack-of-all-trades Kiera Umehara as she races to solve two murders she's been framed for. When her landlord raises the requirements for "social scores" necessary for her and her polyamorous partners to stay in their property, a desperate Kiera takes a job with hangdog, technophobic private eye Angel Herrera tracking down and exposing duplicitous lovers using her hacking skills. Then two bodies turn up with only two things tying them together: their connection to Kiera and a stick of Nag Champa incense left at the crime scenes. The unlikely detective duo must stick together to solve the mystery and clear Kiera's name. Wood's punchy, pulpy style is well-suited to the subject matter, and noir fans will appreciate the many plot twists. The quippiness of the dialogue occasionally comes at the cost of the story's emotional beats, and the rapid-fire references can become difficult to wade through in pursuit of the plot, but once the story finds its footing, it rollicks along. The result is fresh, exciting cyberpunk. *Agent: Stacia Decker, Dunow Carlson & Lerner. (May.)*

### Psyche and Eros

**Luna McNamara.** Morrow, $27.99 (304p) ISBN 978-0-06-329507-0

McNamara's attractively told debut reimagines the Greek myth of Eros and Psyche as a romance between two unpleasant people. Difficult bits of Apuleius's original telling in *The Golden Ass* have been smoothed to a simpler reflection of modern mores. Psyche is not a younger sister but an only child, raised like a boy to be a hero. Stripped of sibling rivalries, feminine constraints, and a belief in her powerlessness before the gods, this Psyche, though not without her charm, is unimaginative, single-minded, domineering, and arrogantly youthful. She doesn't need to learn about agency and capability—she needs to get past self-absorption. Meanwhile, immortal Eros is bored and yearns for impossible death. He's explicit that his arrows of desire only work "if I infused them with my will," yet an accidental scratch is enough to infect him with cursed lovesickness for Psyche. It also turns him into one of the tropiest romantic types: the guy who's too afraid to communicate. This pairing results in an eminently readable love story that fails to be memorable because it refuses to engage with the tough stuff. *Agents: Maria Whelan and Catherine Drayton, InkWell Management. (May)*

### In an Orchard Grown from Ash

**Rory Power.** Del Rey, $28.99 (464p) ISBN 978-0-593-35500-8

Power's blood-soaked and tragic conclusion to the Wind-Up Garden duology (after *In a Garden Burning Gold*) follows the four royal Argyros siblings—Rhea, Lexos, Nitsos, and Chrysanthi—in the wake of personal and political loss. As Rhea struggles with inheriting her father's power over death, she vows to hunt down and kill Nitsos for using his power to manipulate her choices. She sends Chrysanthi after Nitsos as part of her bid for revenge, but Chrysanthi's real goal is to reunite her family. Lexos, eager to regain power of his own, allies himself with Ettore, a member of the rival Domina family. Meanwhile, Nitsos seeks to locate the mysterious saints' graves, a goal that soon sweeps up everyone on the continent in a race to either obtain or destroy the fabled power the graves contain. All the siblings independently converge on the saints' final resting place—where doom awaits the family. The author probes even deeper into her series' exploration of power and corruption, but adds a hopeful note amid all the tragedy and destruction that makes the bloodshed feel worthwhile. Series fans will find this a satisfying conclusion. *Agent: Kim Witherspoon, InkWell Management. (May)*

### Perilous Times

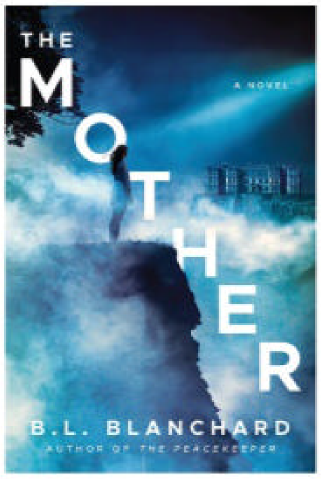
**Thomas D. Lee.** Ballantine, $28.99 (496p) ISBN 978-0-593-49901-6

Debut novelist Lee takes a side-eyed look at both chivalric legends and contemporary eco-warriors in this hopeful eco-fantasy that asks whether Excalibur might be able to slay climate change. After blowing up a fracking facility and accidentally unleashing a dragon, young activist Mariam escapes the chaos with the aid of a recently resurrected Sir Kay, knight of the Round Table and foster brother of King Arthur. Given repeated lives by Merlin, Kay is used to being revived for military missions but he's less prepared to handle the more abstract foe that is the collapse of Britain's ecology. He knows, however, that the resurrected Arthur's plan to "make Britain great again" is not the right tactic. Instead, Excalibur needs a new and better wielder. Lee does not skimp on the bleakness of the environmental crisis nor on naming its villains, but he maintains a steady faith in humanity's ability to bring itself back from the brink; swords can do more than cleave if they become rallying symbols for folks who do not recognize their own heroism. Readers with a love of Arthurian romance and ecological optimism will appreciate Mariam and Kay's struggles and triumphs. *Agent: Sam Morgan, Lotts Agency. (May)*

### The Mother

**B.L. Blanchard.** 47North, $16.99 trade paper (304p) ISBN 978-1-5420-3653-5

Blanchard (*The Peacekeeper*) spins a dark and occasionally confusing *Handmaid's Tale*–esque thriller set in an alternate present in which England is a poor, backward island nation and Europe is controlled by a deeply misogynistic Holy Roman Empire. Marie, Duchess of Suffolk, grabs a collection of jewels and fakes her own death to escape her husband's bleak Grayside estate and seek out her mother, whose own suicide Marie suspects was similarly faked in the wake of her inability to give Marie's father a male heir. Marie travels to London to reunite with her street-savvy sister Emma and continue her search, all while avoiding John Hart, her mother-in-law's manservant, who has been sent to bring her back. The worldbuilding feels sloppy, especially around the sporadic availability of technology: married women's access to cell phones is heavily limited by WifeLock technology, but paper phone books still list unmarried women; meanwhile, though the internet exists, it somehow plays no part in tracking people down. Still, the fond relationships between Marie and her family, contrasted with the unsubtle evil machinations of her husband's family, make rooting for these refugee women exciting and easy. Readers who can look past some shoddy construction will enjoy this dystopian thrill ride. *(May)*



## Romance/Erotica

### All the Right Notes

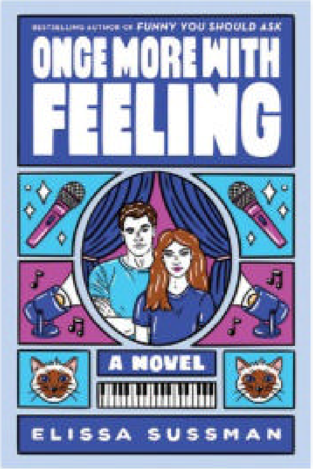
**Dominic Lim.** Forever, $15.99 trade paper (352p) ISBN 978-1-5387-2538-2

Lim debuts with a delightful queer second-chance romance between Quito Cruz, the gay Filipino narrator, and Emmett Aoki, biracial heartthrob of Sunvalley High. Alternating "Then" and "Now" chapters tell a sweet if slightly overstuffed tale that touches myriad romance tropes (enemies to lovers, grumpy/sunshine, only one bed, forced proximity) with affection and sincerity. In high school, Quito is an anxious musical prodigy whose dad is choir director; Emmett is a popular jock who joins choir when allergies force him out of shop class. Mr. Cruz, a kindly puppet master, maneuvers the boys into a tutoring relationship, leading to an unlikely friendship and a secret romance. In the present, Quito works at a New York piano bar, and his only contact with Emmett, now an action hero, is what he sees on TV. When Quito's dad calls to announce his retirement concert, he orders Quito to bring Emmett along to sing. Unwilling to admit he hasn't spoken to Emmett in 20 years, Quito enlists his drag queen roommate, Ujima, to help orchestrate a reunion. Along the way there's tempting Filipino cuisine, show tunes, and deus ex machina interventions by a universe determined to bring these guys together. Light and charming, with a hint of snark, this is a promising start for Lim. *Agent: Gina Panettieri, Talcott Notch Literary. (June)*

### ★ Once More with Feeling

**Elissa Sussman.** Dell, $17 trade paper (416p) ISBN 978-0-593-35737-8

Sussman (*Funny You Should Ask*) dazzles in this smart second-chance romance. The artist formerly known as Katee Rose—now Kathleen Rosenberg—gets a second chance at her Broadway dreams 10 years after her music career was torpedoed by her vengeful ex-boyfriend, Ryan. Her best friend, songwriter Harriet Watson, has written a part specifically for Kathleen in her new 1940s-set musical. There's just one problem: the director is Cal Kirby, who was in a popular boy band with Ryan and whom Kathleen has been crushing on since their theater camp days. The press has painted Kathleen as a man-eating "slut" ever since Ryan leaked news that Kathleen cheated on him—but no one knows that she cheated with Cal. In the fallout, Cal stayed far away, and Kathleen struggled to rebuild her life. But when they're forced to work together, old feelings reignite. Sussman skillfully toggles between flashbacks and the present, teasing out her characters' fraught backstories. Her leads are complex, appealing, and multilayered, and the perfectly paced plot offers real insight into celebrity culture and media slut-shaming. Sussman's first-rate latest will please her existing fans and win her many new ones. *Agent: Elizabeth Bewley, Sterling Lord Literistic. (May)*



### Someone Else's Bucket List

**Amy T. Matthews.** Kensington, $16.95 trade paper (352p) ISBN 978-1-4967-4208-7

In this multiple-tissue contemporary romance, Matthews (*End of the Night Girl*) explores the bond between sisters, the role of social media in society, and the way medical debt can cripple an entire family. Jodie Boyd's family is paralyzed with grief after Jodie's outgoing older sister, Bree, an influencer, dies of cancer. Adding to the stress, they are responsible for her enormous medical bills. Jodie takes on extra hours at the car rental job she detests but then is offered a deal: agree to publicly complete the bucket list Bree posted on social media and Bree's Instagram sponsor will pay off the debt. Shy, passive, and social media–averse Jodie reluctantly agrees and heads to New York to take on the nerve-racking assignments—the most intimidating of which is "fall in love." Luckily, her high school crush, Kelly Wong, who abandoned Jodie at prom but whom she's always carried a torch for, reenters her life and makes that task a bit easier. Matthews creates myriad tear-jerking moments and puts a fresh spin on the somewhat tired bucket list trope. Fans of Josie Silver and Cecelia Ahern will be taken by this story of joy after grief. *Agent: Sarah Younger, Nancy Yost Literary. (May)*

### Pas de Don't

**Chloe Angyal.** Amberjack, $16.99 trade paper (304p) ISBN 978-1-64160-908-1

Angyal's sweet debut novel (after her 2021 nonfiction title *Turning Pointe*) delivers ballet, romance, and female empowerment with Australian flair. From the outside, Heather Hays, a principal ballerina with the New York Ballet engaged to her celebrity dance partner, appears to have it all. In reality, her verbally abusive fiancé has convinced her that he's the cornerstone of her success. When she finds out he's cheating, a month dancing for the Australian National Ballet seems like the perfect way to escape the drama and prove herself capable without him. One of the ANB's principal dancers, Marcus Campbell, is having the worst year of his life due to the death of his father and a debilitating injury. Then Heather arrives, and things immediately look up as he agrees to show her around Sydney. Unfortunately, the company's "Pas de Don't" policy means that any dancers who get caught dating will be fired. There's a lot of backstory to get through before the love story begins in earnest, but readers who stick with it will be rewarded by an emotional forbidden romance that doubles as a love letter to ballet and a travelogue through Sydney. This is a treat. *Agent: JL Stermer, Next Level Lit. (May)*

### The Last Word

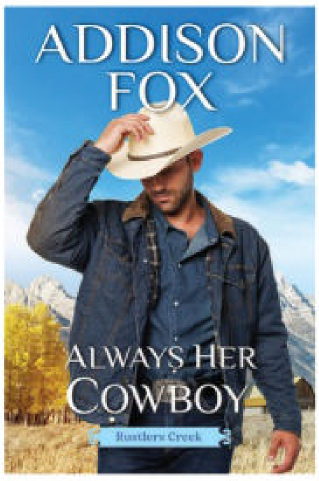
**Katy Birchall.** Griffin, $17 trade paper (384p) ISBN 978-1-250-88275-2

Two ambitious journalists go head to head in this glossy office romance from Birchall (*The Wedding Season*). Londoner Harper Jenkins is skeptical of love. Still burned from a heartbreak 11 years earlier, she makes her career as a celebrity journalist her top priority. She's just managed to score a scoop that could be her big break when she learns that her former flame, the suave Ryan Jansson, has joined her magazine's features team. Ryan is just as charming, gorgeous, and competitive as she remembers, and the office becomes a war zone as the pair bicker over articles and work habits and vie for the last word. A press trip to Italy puts the pair in close proximity, reigniting old sparks and making Harper question if she should take a second chance on love. Though slow to start, the pace picks up as the romance heats up. Ryan and Harper's chemistry is undeniable and their constant competitions are exhilarating. Fans of the enemies-to-lovers trope should check this out. *(May)*

### Always Her Cowboy

**Addison Fox.** Avon, $9.99 mass market (384p) ISBN 978-0-06-313530-7

Daddy issues hinder the relationship between a Montana rancher and a PR professional in Addison's satisfying follow-up to *Forget Me Not Cowboy*. Charlotte Wayne and Chance Beaumont have been mutually crushing on each other since grade school, but their inability to express their infatuation has turned into a sexy love-hate relationship of teasing and sniping at each other. Their exaggerated animosity fools no one, and after a steamy kiss, Charlotte suggests they give a real relationship a go. But Chance, who was raised by an emotionally abusive father who bequeathed him a financially struggling ranch, doesn't feel he's worthy of Charlotte, whose family is considered "ranching royalty." When Chance discovers oil on his property, he struggles to accept his new wealth, making Charlotte realize it's more than money standing in their way; she fears his childhood trauma will forever cloud his judgment on how great he is. Steamy sex scenes are a welcome reprieve from the couple's angsty push and pull, which can occasionally feel like Chance making any excuse not to commit. Charlotte's loyalty, however, is admirable and Chance's big heart shines through all the drama. It's a worthy addition to the series. *Agent: Holly Root, Root Literary. (May)*



## Comics

### ★ Blood of the Virgin

**Sammy Harkham.** Pantheon, $30 (296p) ISBN 978-0-593-31669-6

*L.A. Times* Book Prize winner Harkham (*Crickets*) delivers an ambitious panoramic period piece set in the early 1970s Hollywood exploitation film milieu. Seymour, a 20-something Iraqi Jewish immigrant, works as an editor for Reverie, a production company specializing in cheap grindhouse flicks. He's eager to direct his own script, and finally gets his shot with *Blood of the Virgin* after the original director is fired. Harkham spends a generous amount of the narrative detailing the grueling, often heartless day-to-day work of filmmaking, and in parallel, Seymour's increasingly stressful home life. His smart, tart-tongued wife, Ida, is exhausted from caring for their infant son, resulting in misunderstandings, frustration, and Seymour's increasingly wandering eye toward an actor in his film. (The ruthless studio head, Val, casually tells Seymour, "Don't get so down, your marriage won't last.") Harkham vividly depicts the perils of ambition and heartbreak inherent in collaborative creative projects, while glimpses into Hollywood history cleverly link Seymour to historical figures who were sacrificed to an oppressive studio system. Pages are stacked with close panels and thin line drawings that capture choice moments from back lots to late nights. Harkham's accomplished cartooning, nuanced characters, and sharp period detail keep this sprawling tale thrumming with energy and painful insights. *Agent: Liz Parker, Verve Talent and Literary. (May)*

BLOOD OF THE VIRGIN
SAMMY HARKHAM

### The World of Andong Agimat: The Mystery of the Talisman

**Arnold Arre.** Tuttle, $17.99 trade paper (232p) ISBN 978-0-8048-5545-7

Arre (*The Mythology Class*) redefines superhero tropes in this explosive tale of mystical antiheroes who protect the gritty streets of Manila. Maria, a nature goddess who's lost her human lover and forgotten her own identity, gets taken by the demon Zolgo. Brooding, violent ex-gang-leader Fernando "Ando" Asedillio teams up with his own former love, Silang, among a team of supernatural helpers, in order to rescue Maria. Together they race to stop Zolgo before he can use the goddess's powers to serve a chaotic plague he's spreading via members of his growing cult. Wielding a mystical talisman, Ando wards off low-level enemies, defeats the demon, and reunites the lovers. Arre's dynamic use of motion lines and detailed, frenetic black-and-white art creates tension and keeps the pace up, while the ricochet of English and Tagalog dialogue and wall-to-wall panel saturation immerses readers into the noir-ish Manila street scenes and disorienting but thrilling action arcs, which recall the perversions of *Sin City* as much as *Dark Knight*–style vigilante sequences. Arre, one of the Phillipines' master cartoonists, weaves his magic yet again. *(Mar.)*

### Harvey Knight's Odyssey

**Nick Maandag.** Drawn & Quarterly, $24.95 trade paper (168p) ISBN 978-1-77046-632-6

Corporate anomie and the madness of modernity are taken for a spin in this alternately ambitious and shoe-gazing collection of comics short stories from Maandag (*The Follies of Richard Wadsworth*). The surreal lengthy title piece posits a cultish Church of Holy Radiance whose theology of "solarism" (in a universe divided into light and dark, tanning beds are virtuous) seems kooky but benign. That's until it's revealed the church endorses killing anyone deemed a "shadowmen" by the righteous. Over the course of the increasingly violent tale, lumpy-headed fanatic Harvey Knight bends the church to his particular megalomaniacal fervor. Scenes of blasé murder alternate with darkly comedic vignettes, such as Harvey's acolyte serving "fresh owl" for lunch. Two shorter autofiction selections serve as bookends and feature a mild-mannered office worker named Nick Maandag, who navigates lightly Kafkaesque alienation in cubicle land. His tribulations range from the surprise "daily ritual" office mates create around his making French press coffee to his

## [Q&A]

### *PW* TALKS WITH SAMMY HARKHAM

# Big Screen, Bigger Dreams

A struggling 1970s filmmaker stars in Harkham's *Blood of the Virgin* (Pantheon, May; reviewed on p. 39), an expansive tale of ambition and the immigrant experience.

When did you realize *Blood of the Virgin* would be a much bigger work than your short comics?

I started thinking about a handful of ideas, and didn't see a connection between them, but I could feel a connection. Film preproduction was a structural coat hanger I could hang ideas on. I thought, if the characters start revealing more of themselves, we'll go into production and postproduction. Because the story was first serialized, I tried to make every chapter work on its own terms. That helps keep you from thinking about the macro, but leads to a lot of painting yourself into corners. But if you're true to the characters, they'll keep leading the way.

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Did you draw on any personal history for this story?

The initial spark was thinking about my parents and their strange and disparate backgrounds—my mother coming from New Zealand, my father coming out of Iraq and being a refugee in Israel, and how they somehow ended up together in Los Angeles. My father didn't work in film, and no character is inherently based on anyone real, but thinking about that history, about Los Angeles, and about art-making in an industry of commerce, all had enough mystery for me to dig in.

The story follows an ambitious filmmaker, Seymour. Are his struggles similar to those of a comics creator?

I think we can all relate to feeling hemmed in by the world, and our expectations of ourselves. It's very much a young man's way of thinking, and I think it's universal. That cinematic setting was a really good pressure cooker.

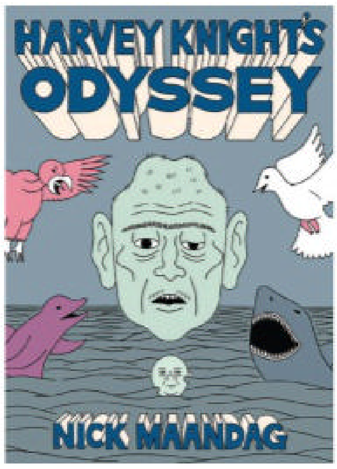
What sort of research did you do?

I got in touch with [*Gremlins* director] Joe Dante, who was a film editor for Roger Corman. It was so nice of him to sit with me on the phone while I asked questions like "How many people had a key to the editing room?" Capsule reviews Dante wrote for a distribution catalog for drive-ins, with all the terminology for exhibitors, were another doorway to thinking about the industry. And then talking to filmmaker friends, trying to get to the point where you can smell the set on some lot off a side street in the Valley, in a decade you've never lived in.

The scope widens beyond 1970s Los Angeles. How did those threads enter your story?

Exploitation cinema of the early '70s is a setting that leads us to a lot of other places. It was a little scary. Comics being such a slow process, you know where you're possibly going to go, but that it's going to be years from now. This is a relationship drama at its core, but in this Trojan horse of horror movies and the Holocaust and cowboys and husbands and wives.

—CHRIS BURKHALTER



descent into an absurdist landscape of stone-faced bureaucracy and quotidian persecution. The black-and-white art is simple but dynamic, presenting the fantastic with a relentlessly straight face. Not all the elements tie together, but the mordant package will appeal to deadpan comedy fans of the likes of Nick Drnaso or Jason. *(Mar.)*

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### Evita: The Life and Work of Eva Perón

**Héctor Germán Oesterheld, Alberto Breccia, and Enrique Breccia, trans. from the Spanish by Erica Mena.** Fantagraphics, $19.99 (72p) ISBN 978-1-68396-691-3

This hagiographic 1970s biography of Eva Perón (1919-1952) appears in English for the first time, part of an ongoing resurrection of originals by Breccia and Oesterheld (*Mort Cinder*). Conflicting reports of the "poor, uncertain origin" of Eva (renowned as Evita) are bantered through, but by 1935 she's portrayed working as a radio actor in Buenos Aires and in 1944 is romantically involved with Juan Perón, a socialist colonel running the ministry of labor. Following the 1945 demonstrations that bring Perón to power, Eva draws support with rousing speeches. She flexes power for the populist agenda, creates a strong social welfare state, aides the passage of women's suffrage, and tours postwar Europe to showcase Argentine alternatives to American financial support. Her long, grueling days and fervent dedication stumble in 1951, when illness saps her strength before her rapid decline and death. Present-tense narration gives a breathless, urgent quality to the arc of Eva's many accomplishments, though the tendency to flit over time periods may trip up readers. The artwork is more of an illustrated biography than sequential art, but the stark black-and-white is crisp with powerful expressionist flourishes. It's both a time capsule and a rousing paean to Evita's socialist endeavors. *(Mar.)*

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# Nonfiction

## The Ruble: A Political History

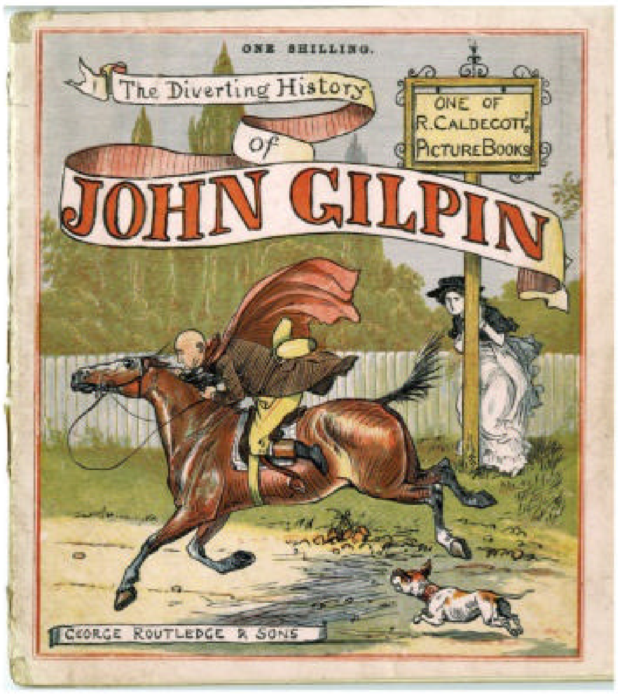
**Ekaterina Pravilova.** Oxford Univ., $39.95 (528p) ISBN 978-0-19-766371-4

In this scrupulously researched monograph, Princeton historian Pravilova (*A Public Empire*) offers "an alternative vision of the emergence, growth, and collapse of the Russian empire" by focusing on the evolution of its currency. Catherine the Great created Russia's first paper money, the assignat, in 1769. Initially backed by Russia's enormous copper reserves, it funded the empire's unbridled expansion and numerous wars with the Ottoman Empire and Persia. Monetary reforms in 1839 introduced the silver-based credit ruble, but "conspicuously rejected the principles of state accountability for the issuance of money." Not convertible and basically worthless, the ruble became a metaphor for depravity for Russian writers like Gogol and Dostoyevsky, while Slavophiles hailed it as a symbol of Russia's distinctiveness. In the late 19th century, Russia needed to build railroads and waterways for new territories in Siberia; finance minister Sergei Witte's gold-based fiscal reforms brought an influx of foreign capital for these projects, but also sowed the seeds of revolution. Ironically, after the Bolsheviks' victory in 1917 and Lenin's "clumsy" takeover of the Russian State Bank, "the demand for money increased almost instantly... as if the promise of its eventual extinction was a joke." Intricate yet accessible, and shot through with mordant flashes of wit, this is a revealing study of how financial crises and ill-fated reforms shaped a nation. *(June)*

## Girls and Their Monsters: The Genain Quadruplets and the Making of Madness in America

**Audrey Clare Farley.** Grand Central, $29 (304p) ISBN 978-1-53872-447-7

Farley (*The Unfit Heiress*), a history professor at Mount St. Mary's University, skillfully recounts the tragic tale of the Morlok quadruplets, four siblings born in 1930 who largely lived in the public spotlight and privately battled severe mental health issues. A media sensation since their birth, the sisters (later given the Genain surname pseudonym during research projects to protect their identities) were effectively raised by controlling and abusive parents to have a single identity. As the girls grew up, they did a stint touring the country as a dancing troupe, began to have hallucinations, and were all diagnosed as schizophrenic. In the 1950s, they became part of a National Institute of Mental Health study on the causes of schizophrenia, for which they underwent psychotherapy sessions and hours of doll-playing—and which, eventually, pointed to both genetic and environmental factors. Farley writes that the Morlok girls were "formed in a world gone mad" and sets their story against a backdrop of swirling cultural forces, from the sexualization of children in pop culture (most vividly illustrated by the emergence of "it-girl" Shirley Temple) to the mapping of the human genome. Though often grim, Farley's narrative is based in deep research and makes for her nuanced analysis of the country's shifting attitudes toward childhood and mental health. Readers will be riveted. *(June)*



*The cover of an 1878 children's book illustrated by Randolph Caldecott, namesake of the Caldecott Medal, as seen in Leonard Marcus's* Pictured Worlds *(reviewed on p. 47).*

© COURTESY OF THE MIRIAM AND IRA D. WALLACH DIVISION OF ART, PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS: PICTURE COLLECTION, THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY DIGITAL COLLECTIONS.

## Conquistadors and Aztecs: A History of the Fall of Tenochtitlan

**Stefan Rinke, trans. from the German by Christopher Reid.** Oxford Univ., $34.95 (328p) ISBN 978-0-19-755246-9

Historian Rinke (*Latin America and the First World War*) revisits in this comprehensive and insightful chronicle the fall of Tenochtitlan and the Mexica (or Aztec) Empire in the early 16th century. Adding depth and nuance to historical accounts of a small band of conquistadors swiftly overcoming a massive empire through technological and tactical superiority, Rinke draws on Indigenous and Spanish sources to uncover a much more complex series of events. He sketches Hernán Cortés's youth in Spain and departure for the Caribbean in 1504, before shifting gears to focus on Mexica ruler Moctezuma II and the empire's state of disarray prior to Cortés's expedition to Mesoamerica in 1519. Much attention is paid to the Spaniards' interactions with the Totonacs, Tlaxcalans, and other Mexica vassal states and enemies who proved to be invaluable allies in the battle for Tenochtitlan, which lasted for more than a year and involved victories and setbacks for both sides. Only in subsequent histories, primarily by non-Indigenous peoples, was the fall of the Mexica Empire viewed as inevitable. Rinke's prodigious research enables him to disentangle the biological, psychological, military, and sociocultural factors behind this much mythologized conquest. The result is a vital reconsideration of the history of the New World. Illus. *(June)*

## ★ Our Migrant Souls: A Meditation on Race and the Meanings and Myths of "Latino"

**Héctor Tobar.** MCD, $27 (256p) ISBN 978-0-374-60990-0

Pulitzer winner Tobar (*The Last Great Road Bum*) explores in this probing, heartfelt essay collection the promises and contradictions inherent within Latino identity. Aiming to help young Latinos "untangl[e] the roots of the racist ideas about us," Tobar interweaves autobiographical reflections on growing up in L.A. and visiting his family in Guatemala with profiles of undocumented immigrants; cultural analyses of how Latinos are portrayed in American films, television, and literature; and historical vignettes on the Spanish conquest of Mesoamerica, the annexing of New Mexico and California, the rise of the Chicano Movement, the "militarization" of the U.S. border with Mexico, and more. Throughout, he highlights the diversity of Latinos ("Latino people are brown, Black, white, and Indigenous, and they are European, Asian, and African. Some of us speak excellent Spanish, but many more of us do not") and fiercely critiques the "static, one-dimensional images" of suffering immigrants that saturate U.S. journalism. Lyrical and uncompromising, this is a powerful call for all Americans to "dedicat[e] our energy and our intellects to creating new ways of being in the world." *Agent: Jay Mandel, WME. (May)*

### Homegrown: Timothy McVeigh and the Rise of Right-Wing Extremism

**Jeffrey Toobin.** Simon & Schuster, $29.99 (432p) ISBN 978-1-6680-1357-1

Toobin (*True Crimes and Misdemeanors*) delivers an eye-opening study of Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995. Drawing on the defense team's internal records, interviews with McVeigh's family members, and other primary sources, Toobin recounts how McVeigh became obsessed with guns when he was young; grew fixated on the white supremacist novel *The Turner Diaries*, whose protagonist bombs an FBI building; and joined the Army in 1988, meeting his future co-conspirator Terry Nichols on the first day of basic training. After serving in the First Gulf War, McVeigh was largely aimless upon his return stateside. Angered by the federal government's handling of the 1992 Ruby Ridge standoff, the 1993 raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Tex., and Bill Clinton's signing of the 1994 assault weapons ban, McVeigh and Nichols believed the government had declared war on gun owners and planned to strike back, assembling the materials to make a bomb that killed more than 160 lives, including 15 children. Toobin also delves into McVeigh's anti-tax convictions, veneration of the Declaration of Independence, and conspiracy thinking, building a persuasive case that the bombing was motivated by beliefs that have come to dominate right-wing politics. It's a tragic and edifying account of the road to domestic terrorism. *(May)*

### The Yellow Pad: Making Better Decisions in an Uncertain World

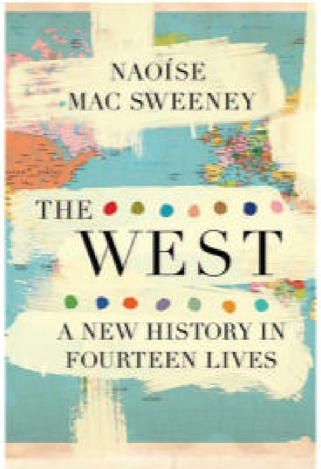
**Robert E. Rubin.** Penguin Press, $32 (336p) ISBN 978-0-593-49139-3

Evaluating probability is key to navigating the complexities and uncertainties of modern life, contends Rubin (*In an Uncertain World*), former U.S. Treasury secretary and cochairman of Goldman Sachs, in this earnest if flawed offering. He shares how he's made major professional decisions by writing on a yellow legal pad "a list of possible outcomes in one column, and my estimated odds of each outcome occurring in the other," and then choosing the option promising the greatest reward at the highest probability. Recognizing how biases influence decision-making is crucial, he argues, noting how his awareness of his risk aversion enables him to compensate for when he overweighs risk in his tabulations. However, the yellow pad approach sometimes gets dropped in favor of dubiously relevant anecdotes from Rubin's career, such as when he recounts adopting a more supportive stance toward his colleagues to make the jump from arbitrage to management at Goldman Sachs, a change that had little to do with navigating uncertainties. Additionally, the dry prose dulls the impact of stories from the author's extraordinary career (even an account of a Goldman Sachs partner's arrest for insider trading falls flat). Torn between a standard business memoir and a broader program for navigating uncertainty, this struggles to find its footing. *(May)*

### The West: A New History in Fourteen Lives

**Naoíse Mac Sweeney.** Dutton, $30 (448p) ISBN 978-0-593-47217-0

The idea of a coherent Western tradition is "both morally repugnant and factually wrong," according to this pugnacious and erudite historiography. University of Vienna archaeology professor Mac Sweeney (*Troy*) debunks the "grand narrative of Western Civilization"—a distinctive European culture evolving from Greco-Roman antiquity through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment to modernity, and tending toward democracy, capitalism, and individualism—through biographical sketches of historical figures. The multicultural worldview of the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, she argues, shows that the Greeks had no notion of a Western civilization distinct from Asian and African cultures, while ninth-century Muslim scholar al-Kindī considered Greek philosophy the intellectual foundation of Islamic, not European, culture. The idea of Western civilization, Mac Sweeney contends, was a 17th-century innovation that served mainly to justify racism and colonialism, as demonstrated in her profiles of enslaved poet Phillis Wheatley, whose "erudite allusions to classical and biblical literature" clashed with assumptions that nonwhites could not master Western learning, and 19th-century British statesman William Gladstone, who imagined an exclusively white, Western tradition to rationalize British imperialism. Though Mac Sweeney sometimes overreaches in her eagerness to skewer the idea of the West, as when she suggests that medieval Europe recognized no continuity with ancient Greece, she skillfully synthesizes a wealth of scholarship and draws vibrant character sketches. It's a case to be reckoned with. Illus. *(May)*



### Quantum Supremacy: How the Quantum Computer Revolution Will Change Everything

**Michio Kaku.** Doubleday, $30 (320p) ISBN 978-0-385-54836-6

In this disappointing outing, theoretical physicist Kaku (*The God Equation*) argues that quantum computers (machines that compute on atoms rather than transistors) will transform the modern world. Quantum computers, he explains, are "100 trillion times faster than an ordinary supercomputer" because rather than relying on binary code, they process data based on the infinite ways that an atom's spin can occur in relation to a magnetic field, making them capable of complex computations that remain out of reach for digital computers. Despite Kaku's best efforts, readers will likely be left scratching their heads at the descriptions of how different models of quantum computing work, with one that involves "ion traps" in which atoms spin upward or downward and another that takes advantage of the polarization of light. Kaku's speculation on how quantum computing will help combat climate change, currently incurable diseases, the energy crisis, and world hunger doesn't say much about the technology; instead, he details the challenges each presents and concludes with the jejune conjecture that increased computing power might solve them. Difficult to grasp and carrying a whiff of ungrounded techno-utopianism, this is a rare misfire for Kaku. *(May)*

* * *

### An Army Afire: How the U.S. Army Confronted Its Racial Crisis in the Vietnam Era

**Beth Bailey.** Univ. of North Carolina, $35 (360p) ISBN 978-1-4696-7326-4

University of Kansas historian Bailey (*America's Army*) offers a detailed examination of the U.S. Army's efforts to address "the problem of race" in the late 1960s and early '70s. In straightforward prose, she catalogs myriad racial incidents; profiles soldiers who "demanded attention to their status as Black men and to the problems they faced within the U.S. Army" and leaders who were primarily concerned about racial conflict because it "disrupted military efficiency"; analyses the Army's frequent attempts to redress racism in its ranks; and examines pervasive racial inequities on and off military bases (primarily in the South) and in Vietnam. In doing so, she covers the well-known—including the August 1968 uprising by Black soldiers at the Long Binh Jail near Saigon—and the obscure, such as Richard Nixon's politically motivated demand in the spring of 1971 to erect a monument at West Point to graduates who died serving in the Confederate Army. Though Bailey all but ignores significant racial disparities in the other military branches at the time, her in-depth reporting on the Army's attempts to "assess and address Black soldiers' complaints" sheds light on what was accomplished, as well as how far there is left to go. It's a valuable study of the challenges to institutional reform. *(May)*

* * *

### ★ Shakespeare Was a Woman and Other Heresies: How Doubting the Bard Became the Biggest Taboo in Literature

**Elizabeth Winkler.** Simon & Schuster, $29.99 (416p) ISBN 978-1-982171-26-1

This sharp debut by journalist Winkler expands on her 2019 *Atlantic* essay

## [Q&A]

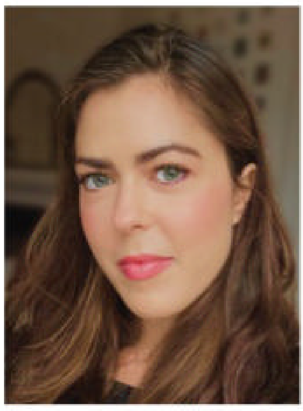
### *PW* TALKS WITH ELIZABETH WINKLER

# A Bard by Any Other Name

In *Shakespeare Was a Woman and Other Heresies* (Simon & Schuster, May; reviewed on this page), journalist Winkler surveys the debate around who wrote the plays and poems attributed to William Shakespeare.

What originally drew you to the Shakespeare authorship question?

I came to this from a place of love. My background is in English literature. I love Shakespeare, and I especially love Shakespeare's women characters. There are so many scholars and writers who have written about Shakespeare's uncanny understanding of women and the feminine sensibility in his plays as something that's remarkable and often absent in his fellow playwrights, and I had never come across an explanation for how Shakespeare came to write feminist drama or where this uncanny understanding of women came from. That led to the question, "Is it possible that a woman had a hand somewhere in these plays? Could a woman have been involved?" In addition to that, the heatedness of the debate drew me in. Some reactions [to the author's 2019 *Atlantic* article on the authorship controversy] suggested that questioning Shakespeare is comparable to denying the Holocaust or the efficacy of vaccines. English professors are supposed to teach critical thinking, and this is not an intellectual response. That fascinated me and made me want to dig deeper.



© CAROLINE WINKLER

Was there a fact or argument you found particularly persuasive in questioning the orthodox view on Shakespeare?

It's not one thing but rather the cumulative effect of all the missing pieces. You can write off one problem here or one gap there, but the accumulation of problems is harder to dismiss. How could someone who cares so much about language and words and ideas not educate their children? There's the lack of Shakespeare's literary or personal records, and the fact that at his death there was no acknowledgement or notice that this great poet had died. Other writers talk about their writing in letters to each other, or in diaries or journals. There are records of payment for their writing. Some left manuscripts. There are education records showing how they acquired their knowledge. For other major writers of the period some bits are missing, but for each you can find something attesting to their careers as writers. Shakespeare didn't leave any of that.

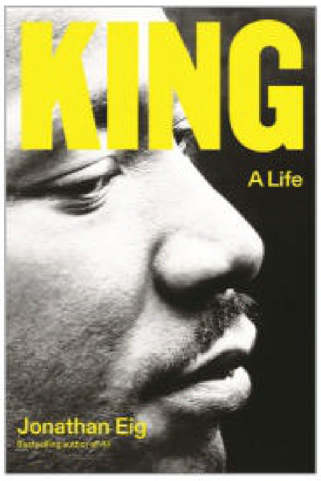
For your money, who do you think wrote Shakespeare's plays?

More than the question itself, I'm interested in how people react to the question and how they respond to the ambiguity around it. I didn't write the book trying to solve "Who was Shakespeare?" The interesting thing is why this is so hard to talk about. Why do people react so emotionally to this question? I made an intentional decision not to argue for any one candidate. I'm interested in the possibility of dwelling in the space of not knowing. What if we admit that we're not sure about this subject? What would happen then?

—JON N. JEFFRYES

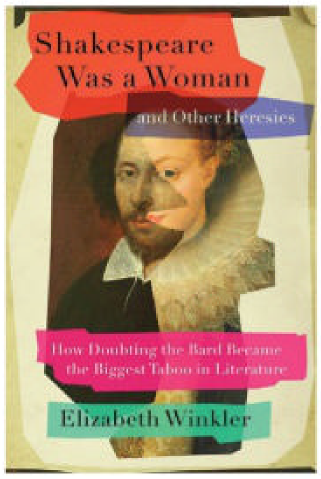
## ★ King: A Life

**Jonathan Eig.** Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $35 (688p) ISBN 978-0-374-27929-5



Martin Luther King Jr. went beyond meek nonviolence into far-reaching radicalism, according to this sweeping biography. Eig (*Ali: A Life*) gives a rousing recap of King's triumphs as a civil rights leader—the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, his "I Have a Dream" speech at the 1963 march on Washington, the 1965 procession from Selma to Montgomery, Ala.—as well as his despondency later in the 1960s as his anti-poverty campaigns struggled and Black energies drifted from nonviolent protest toward armed militance and "Black power." Contesting accusations by Malcolm X and others that King was an "Uncle Tom," Eig casts him as a revolutionary who reshaped the South with his integrationism, became an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War despite losing political support and drawing the ire of the FBI, and developed a deep critique of systemic racism and economic inequality that called for reparations for slavery and a guaranteed minimum income. King is no saint in this complex, nuanced portrait—his plagiarism and womanizing are probed in detail—but Eig's evocative prose ably conveys his bravery, charisma, and spell-binding oratory (rallying the Montgomery boycotters, "he called out in his deep, throbbing voice, and the people responded, the noise of the crowd rolling and pounding in waves that shook the building as he built to a climax"). It's an enthralling reappraisal that confirms King's relevance to today's debates over racial justice. *Agent: David Black, David Black Literary. (May)*

exploring the "messy, ugly dispute" over the authorship of works attributed to Shakespeare. Questioning how a relatively uneducated man from Stratford-upon-Avon could write such learned and feminist plays, Winkler suggests that perhaps "the author was not an uneducated man but an educated woman." She discusses the numerous female candidates scholars have forwarded, including Mary Sidney, a translator who aspired to create "a body of English literature that could stand next to the great works in Greek, Latin, French, and Italian," and Emilia Bassano, a poet who advocated for liberty from male oppression. She also surveys male authors believed by some to be the "real" Shakespeare, noting that playwright Christopher Marlowe is a favorite candidate because he died under mysterious circumstances "just weeks before 'Shakespeare' emerged." Winkler doesn't weigh in on the likeliness of the candidates, but instead uses the controversy to serve up thoughtful meditations on the role of the author, the objectivity of biography, and the limits of scholarly study ("Despite the most heroic efforts of feminist scholars, women of the past will always be, to some degree, 'missing matter' "). Probing and smart, this is sure to stir up lively debate. *(May)*



### Diary of a Tuscan Bookshop

**Alba Donati, trans. from the Italian by Elena Pala.** Scribner, $17.99 trade paper (224p) ISBN 978-1-66801-556-8

The pseudonymous Donati recounts in this agreeable outing the story of her 2021 move from Florence back to her tiny hometown of Lucignana (population 180) to open the mountain village's first bookshop. "The idea must have been lying in wait, ensconced in the folds of that dark and joyous country we call childhood," she writes of her decision. Lacking the funds to pursue the project, Donati turned to crowdfunding, and, to her surprise and delight, donations came pouring in. Soon her project became a genuine sensation, drawing bibliophiles from all over Italy to seek out her robust rare book collection. Using diary entries that begin in January and run through March, Donati writes in real time about Covid and the pandemic's effects on her business. She also includes snippets of local history, musings on village life, and tips for aspiring booksellers ("Never fancy yourself better than your readers"). Donati's anecdotes and book recommendations are undoubtedly delightful, but the memoir aspect lacks focus. Still, bookworms will find plenty to enjoy in this charming if diffuse time capsule. *Agent: Jessica Purdue, Orion Books. (May)*

### Dandelions

**Thea Lenarduzzi.** Fitzcarraldo, $17.95 trade paper (288p) ISBN 978-1-913097-97-4

Lenarduzzi's touching debut, winner of the 2020 Fitzcarraldo Editions Essay Prize, serves up lyrical meditations on food, family, and belonging. She uses the dandelion's easily spread seeds as a metaphor through which to explore her family's migration, focusing on the story of her grandmother Dirce, who at age 24 moved to Manchester, England, from Maniago, Italy, in 1950 amid the country's postwar economic downturn. Weaving together anecdotes from her family's history, she recounts her family's "parable" about Dirce picking dandelion leaves in Manchester to the bewilderment of onlookers, who were unaware that in Italy the leaves were commonly eaten "tossed with salt, perhaps a splash of vinegar." Historical detours enrich the symbolism, as when the author notes that European settlers may have brought dandelions to the Americas in the 17th century because the weed's hardiness ensured it would take root and provide a "steady supply of leaves for salads and stews." Lenarduzzi's admiration for her grandmother's resourcefulness and resilience provides an affecting emotional backbone, and the elegant prose delights ("Tens of moony dandelions were meeting their maker, casting their ghost-seeds to the breeze," she writes about a groundskeeper with a weed trimmer). The result is a ruminative take on what it means to put down roots. *(May)*

### Chicken Scratch: Lessons on Living Creatively from a Flock of Hens

**Ann Byle.** Broadleaf, $22.99 (194p) ISBN 978-1-506-48413-6

In this charming entry, journalist Byle (*The Baker House Book Story*) mines her family's experiences raising a "smart, nosy" brood of chickens for wisdom on living a creative life. Soon after being persuaded by her son to take in one chicken (and then many), Byle began to glean bits of inspiration from the birds, which were constantly "explor[ing] and try[ing] new things," even if that sometimes meant getting stuck underneath the kitchen sink. The birds were motivated by "an insatiable curiosity... about the world around them," and likewise, Byle writes, one should harness a similar spirit to pursue new directions on one's artistic path, even if it means abandoning the original plan. Those who care for chickens must also learn to "let go" as the birds die, and artists, too, would do well to release rigid self-expectations, perfectionism, and self-doubt. Byle intersperses chapters with process-oriented advice (on creating regularly, from the chicken's POV: "My eggs aren't always perfect. Sometimes they look weird.... I still lay them every day, because that's part of being a chicken"), and though she can lay on the puns a bit heavily, the author's perspective on creativity as a work in progress (that's full of trial and error and false starts) resonates. Artists of all stripes will delight in this upbeat offering. *(May)*

### For the Culture: The Power Behind What We Buy, What We Do, and Who We Want to Be

**Marcus Collins.** PublicAffairs, $29 (304p) ISBN 978-1-5417-0096-3

"Anyone with an idea, product, or cause can leverage the influence of culture to inspire... people to act in concert," contends Collins, a marketing professor at the University of Michigan, in his perceptive debut. He explains culture as a "meaning-making system" in which a person signals their ideology or community membership through symbols, and examines why it holds such sway and how marketers can use it to influence consumers. The author suggests that companies transform their brand into a symbol by pairing an ideological stance with their products, as exemplified by Patagonia's calls for prospective customers to repair their current jackets rather than buy new ones, counterintuitively boosting sales from buyers drawn to the company's promotion of ethical consumption. He encourages companies to advertise themselves to groups, based on characteristics, that are likely to share their main conviction (a brand built around the belief that "life is an adventure" might target adrenaline junkies) and to keep up on changes in the group's culture by scrolling Twitter hashtags and Reddit pages. Collins has an unusually sophisticated outlook on what drives consumer behavior, as well as a knack for delivering his smart ideas in accessible prose. This is a superior program on how the business world can use the interplay between culture, consumption, and identity to their advantage. *(May)*

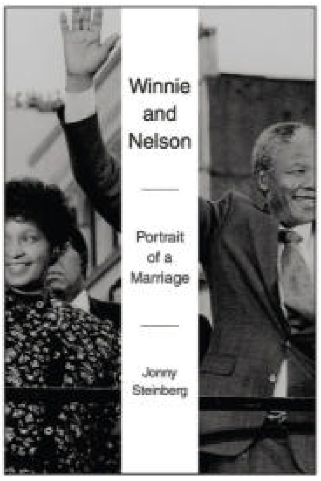
### Uncle of the Year & Other Debatable Triumphs

**Andrew Rannells.** Crown, $28 (256p) ISBN 978-0-593-44343-9

Tony-nominated actor Rannells (*Too Much Is Not Enough*), who appeared in HBO's *Girls* and Broadway's *The Book of Mormon*, recalls his upbringing, career breakthroughs, aging woes, and more in this pithy essay collection. Rannells delivers 20 vignettes that skew wild and gossipy: in "Things You Learn at an Underwear Party," he describes losing his wallet during a night out in the East Village, while in "Always Sit Next to Mark Ruffalo," he gives a star-studded account of his trip to the 2015 Golden Globes as Lena Dunham's date. He also dives into his often "fraught" and "painful" dating life, but scattered among the laughs and winces are moments of real heart, as when he tenderly recounts, in the title essay, caring for his nieces and nephews. In conversational prose,

## ★ Winnie and Nelson: Portrait of a Marriage

**Jonny Steinberg.** Knopf, $35 (576p) ISBN 978-0-525-65685-2



Journalist Steinberg (*A Man of Good Hope*) vividly recreates the political and private lives of anti-apartheid activists Nelson and Winnie Mandela in this exceptional dual biography. African National Congress (ANC) leader Nelson Mandela and social worker Nomzamo Winifred Madikizela met in Johannesburg in 1957. Already a target of the white ruling authorities, Nelson went underground in 1961; arrested and jailed the following year for inciting a strike, he eventually received a lifetime prison sentence. While cultivating an aura of suffering and martyrdom from his cell, Nelson evolved into an inspirational figurehead for a free South Africa. Meanwhile, Winnie raised their daughters, supported the family, and made a place for herself in the ANC. By the 1970s, the ANC became South Africa's preeminent anti-apartheid organization and the Mandelas internationally known as its leaders. Privately, their marriage cracked under the strain. Winnie began taking lovers when Nelson first went underground, which he knew and accepted, though he preferred the myth he wove of their relationship. Rumors also circulated about her drinking and violent behavior. Two years after Nelson's release in 1990, the couple divorced, costing Winnie the last of the power she held with the ANC. The tumultuous decades apart had turned them into "astonishingly scarred human beings," Steinberg writes. Readers will be mesmerized by the thrumming tension and profound emotional complexity of this intimate portrait of two global icons. It's a knockout. Illus. *(May)*

Rannells successfully welcomes readers into his world with humor, grace, and wisdom. Theatergoers and comedy fans alike will find much to love. *Agent: Bill Clegg, Clegg Agency. (May)*

### ★ Arrangements in Blue: Notes on Love and Making a Life

**Amy Key.** Liveright, $28 (240p) ISBN 978-1-324-09173-8

British poet and essayist Key (*Isn't Forever*) takes an intimate, idiosyncratic look at single life in her evocative first memoir. Initially spurred by Joni Mitchell's 1971 album *Blue* to examine her romantic relationships, Key ended up using the record as a lens through which to examine "so many shades of life." Lyrics in "My Old Man" about big beds and frying pans prodded her to cultivate peace while living alone. At 37, she felt an urgent need to have a baby and considered how and whether to become a mother by turning over Mitchell's wrenching "Little Green," which the musician wrote about a previously undisclosed pregnancy. Key describes how struggles with loneliness and singledom can give people "the power to make us the version of ourselves we long for," and how she eventually found liberation in her solitude by way of Mitchell's musings. Filled with lyrical turns of phrase, this insightful take on living solo will appeal to poets, dreamers, and anyone marching to the beat of their own drum. It's a lush and moving memoir. *(May)*

ARRANGEMENTS IN BLUE
Notes on Loving and Living Alone
AMY KEY

### Orphan Bachelors: A Memoir

**Fae Myenne Ng.** Grove, $28 (256p) ISBN 978-0-802-16221-2

In this "book of living memory," novelist Ng (*Bone*) examines the cascading effects of U.S. immigration laws on her Chinese family. From Ng's great-grandfather, a miner who was denied citizenship by the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, to her father, who eluded exclusion in 1940 by memorizing the photos, maps, and biographical details of a stranger's life and passing them off as his own, Ng's family history is defined by absences and secrets: "Asking was disobedience: children didn't need to know the whole story," she writes. Years after the Exclusion Act was repealed and the Eisenhower-era Confession Program, which lured people into confessing illegal entry, revoked her father's citizenship, rifts within the family remained: the Ng sisters took their father's original name while their brothers kept the one he'd assumed to stay in the U.S.; their parents' marriage soured and the siblings became estranged. Grieving the deaths of her mother, father, and youngest brother, Ng returned home to examine her fragmented memories and scraps of handwritten ephemera for glimpses of what might be known of her whole family history, peeling back the lies her father told to survive so she might better understand her place in the world. The author's straightforward prose and the work's staggering scope bring home the myriad ways misguided policies damaged generations of immigrant families. Readers will be rapt. *(May)*

### Life B: Overcoming Double Depression

**Bethanne Patrick.** Counterpoint, $26 (208p) ISBN 978-1-64009-129-0

Book critic and *PW* contributor Patrick (*The Books That Changed My Life*) turns a mirror on her lifelong struggles with mental illness in this bracing memoir. After grappling with depression for decades and coming to the cusp of self-harm multiple times ("On my best days, I was depressed... on my worst days, I considered ending my life"), Patrick finally received a diagnosis at age 52 that changed her life: double depression, a condition in which chronic depression spirals into major depressive episodes during times of great stress. As Patrick dug into her adolescence, she came to realize how the disease had driven her feelings of inadequacy and stalled her productivity: "Being depressed every day—and during high school and college I was not treated for the condition at all—means that every day you come up short. You're not as good, not as worthy, not as savvy, not as talented, not as studious." But with medication and therapy, Patrick began to brighten, and here provides a road map for others to do so as well. Riveting and remarkable in its portrayal of the author's struggles, this will lend hope to others suffering from mental illness and those who love them. It's a standout in a very crowded field. *Agent: Jennie Dunham, Dunham Literary. (May)*

### The Black Reparations Project: A Handbook for Racial Justice

**Edited by William A. Darity Jr., A. Kirsten Mullen, and Lucas Hubbard.** Univ. of California, $24.95 (240p) ISBN 978-0-520-38381-4

Darity, professor of public policy at Duke University, and folklorist Mullen (coauthors, *From Here to Equality*) join forces with researcher Hubbard (coeditor of *The Pandemic Divide*) to present a convincing and concrete plan for paying reparations to Black Americans. In a series of lucid and well-researched essays, contributors detail racial inequalities in wealth, housing, education, and healthcare, and explain how slavery, Jim Crow, redlining, and other forms of structural racism entrenched and exacerbated those inequalities. For example, Duke University developmental psychologist Keisha Bentley-Edwards details how the 1910 Flexner Report, "often heralded as the turning point in modern medical training," led to the closure of all but two Black medical schools, severely undermining Black medical professionals and health outcomes for Black patients. In the book's second half, contributors look to previous examples of reparations, including U.S. government payments to Japanese families interned during WWII; discuss how to garner public support for closing the racial wealth gap through a system of direct payments to Black Americans; and provide case studies in establishing direct lineal descent to an enslaved ancestor, which would be required under the editors' plan. Scholarly and thorough, this is a valuable asset for activists and lawmakers seeking to advance the cause of reparations. *(May)*

### Christian Supremacy: Reckoning with the Roots of Antisemitism and Racism

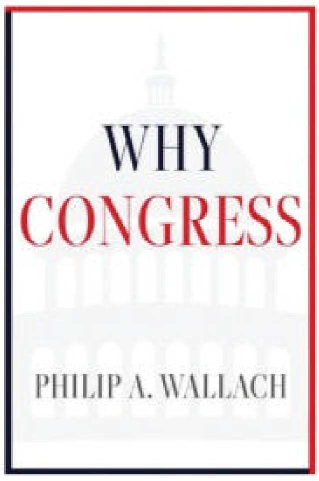
**Magda Teter.** Princeton Univ., $35 (400p) ISBN 978-0-691-24258-3

In this ambitious and provocative study, Fordham University historian Teter (*Blood Libel*) exposes the links between Christian theology and racism and antisemitism. Analyzing ancient Roman laws, Reformation-era antisemitic screeds, papal bulls, parliamentary debates, philology, early 20th-century popular culture, and much more, Teter contends that themes of "slavery" and "servitude," which were applied to Jews by early Christian thinkers including St. Augustine, were later refashioned to justify the enslavement and exclusion of Africans. Like Jews, who were discriminated against because of their religion, "the fact that [African people] were either Muslim or pagan, made it easier for the Christian colonizers to justify their enslavement," according to Teter. Throughout, she carefully distinguishes between antisemitism and anti-Black racism—for example, pointing out that in 19th-century America, "ostracized as Jews may have been or felt socially or politically, they were still considered citizens able to exercise their rights" —while building a persuasive case that many of laws and practices that developed to police racial, ethnic, and religious hierarchies have their roots in late antiquity Christian theology. Though Teter doesn't account much for denominational differences and somewhat underplays Christianity's progressive strains, she draws incisive parallels between disparate time periods and parts of the world and fruitfully interweaves legal, religious, cultural, and political analysis. It's a noteworthy look at the origins and mechanics of oppression. *(May)*

### Why Congress

**Philip A. Wallach.** Oxford Univ., $29.95 (328p) ISBN 978-0-19-765787-4

American Enterprise Institute fellow Wallach debuts with a stout defense of the essential role of Congress in American democracy. Drawing on the Federalist Papers, Woodrow Wilson's *Congressional Government*, and other analyses of "the promise and challenge of representation," Wallach argues that Congress is "the only body in our system capable of setting our national priorities while respecting the diversity of our vast citizenry" and praises the virtues of legislators' "robust (and sometimes ugly) debates." During WWII, Wallach contends, Congress played a vital if underrecognized role in mobilizing the U.S. war effort while "block[ing] the executive branch from becoming an unaccountable controller of the American economy after the war." Elsewhere, Wallach argues that Senate supermajority requirements aided, rather than impeded, the civil rights movement by "ultimately call[ing] forth an irresistibly broad and bipartisan coalition that finally left the Southerners an isolated rump." Beginning in the 1970s, however, a push for uniformity in both party caucuses rendered the institution ineffectual, and Wallach laments the transformation of filibustering from "an attention-focusing, oratorical ordeal to a routine obstacle bereft of actual debate," the passage of emergency actions without deliberation by rank-and-file members, and the increase in executive actions. Ultimately, he calls on legislators to "get out of your partisan trenches and make things happen." Nuanced and persuasive, this is a valuable reminder that Congress has risen to the moment before and can do so again. *(May)*



### Riding with Cochise: The Apache Story of America's Longest War

**Steve Price.** Skyhorse, $26.99 (220p) ISBN 978-1-5107-7457-5

"The Apache Wars are a tragic story of a people who fought long and hard to keep their homeland and their culture despite decades of betrayal by enemies who never really wanted or seriously tried to understand them," writes journalist Price (*The Horse Catalog*) in this well-intentioned yet disorganized history. Focusing on five legendary chieftains—Cochise, Victorio, Nana, Geronimo, and Mangas Coloradas—Price documents numerous battles and conflicts between the Apache peoples and the American government between 1849 and 1886 and vividly describes the Southwestern landscape where these clashes took place. While the pairing of each chieftain with his American counterpart offers insights—for example, Geronimo's pursuer Gen. George Crook "did his best to destroy the Apache culture while at the same time harboring a growing sympathy for the very victims he created from that destruction"—chapters recommending "Places to See" feel out of place and Price's frequent repetitions (the kidnapping and murder of Cochise's family members by Lt. George Nicholas Bascom is covered multiple times) make for a disjointed reading experience. Readers will appreciate the thoroughness but wish it came in a more polished package. Illus. *(May)*

### Into the Groove: The Story of Sound from Tin Foil to Vinyl

**Jonathan Scott.** Bloomsbury Sigma, $28 (320p) ISBN 978-1-4729-7982-7

This enjoyable if somewhat arcane chronicle by music journalist Scott (*The Vinyl Frontier*) examines the history of recorded sound. He traces the development of recordings from the first tin-foil cylindrical records of the late 19th century through the vinyl, cassette, CD, and streaming eras, starting with Thomas Edison's invention of the phonograph and Alexander Graham Bell's perfection of the technology. Digging into the scientific and engineering advances that changed the way people listen to music, he describes how the shellac discs of the early 20th century were made from the secretions of the lac insect and how a turntable's stylus generates vibrations that create an electrical current, which gets "amplified and converted into sound." Scott has an eye for detail, telling, for instance, how vinyl "scratching" was born in 1977 when 12-year-old DJ Grand Wizzard Theodore's mother demanded he turn the music down, causing him to stop the record with his hand and creating the scratching effect. The history mostly entertains, but technical descriptions of how sound is recorded and overviews of equalization curves, groove widths, and CD bit rates will challenge all but the most devoted audiophiles. Still, music lovers will want to take this one for a spin. *(May)*

### Pictured Worlds: Masterpieces of Children's Book Art by 101 Essential Illustrators from Around the World

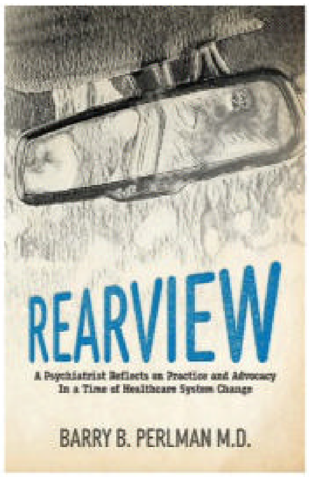
**Leonard S. Marcus.** Abrams, $75 (432p) ISBN 978-1-419-73898-2

In this definitive reference work, children's book historian Marcus (*Mr. Lincoln Sits for His Portrait*) spotlights 101 influential children's book artists from the past two centuries. An “endlessly surprising art form and a bridge between generations,” illustrated children’s books exploded in popularity in the late 19th century thanks to rising literacy rates and new printing technologies. The form has seen no shortage of innovation since, Marcus notes. Among the artists surveyed are British illustrator George Cruikshank, who brought his “comedic zest” to depictions of giants and ogres in the 1823 *Brothers Grimm’s Collection of Popular Stories* (its first appearance in English); four-time Caldecott Honor winner Bryan Collier, whose “mesmerizing trademark watercolor” style complemented the “joyful, high-energy rhythm” of Troy Andrews’s 2015 *Trombone Shorty*; and Eric Carle, who was best known for his collage illustrations made from “sumptuous hand-painted paper,” as seen in, among other classics, 1969’s *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Marcus also highlights lesser-known and international artists, such as Japanese illustrator Chihiro Iwasaki and German Binette Schroeder. By delving into myriad artists’ styles in language that’s reader-friendly without eliding technical detail, Marcus leaves readers to look at the artworks showcased throughout in new ways. Fans of art history and children’s literature will adore this. *(Mar.)*

#### Rearview: A Psychiatrist Reflects on Practice and Advocacy in a Time of Healthcare System Change

**Barry B. Perlman.** BookBaby, $15.99 trade paper (292p) ISBN 978-1-09835-460-2

What is a psychiatrist’s work really like? Perlman, the former director of the department of psychiatry at Saint Joseph’s Medical Center and president of the New York State Psychiatric Association, offers some nuanced answers in this artfully constructed debut memoir. Rather than give a straightforward chronological look at his career, Perlman frames his experiences through vignettes from his work life, which “share an experience and perspective on it and offer insight into the way we doctors understand our professional lives.” The author covers a wide range of topics, including the impact of patient suicide on mental health professionals and the wrenching ethical conundrums presented by end of life decisions. The subject matter isn’t all grim, as when an upset patient asks Perlman why he stuck his tongue out at her. The question initially baffles him, but he eventually places that action in context: he had asked her to do so as part of a neurological exam almost a year earlier. That encounter, he writes, taught him “to be as aware as possible of all aspects, verbal and non-verbal, of my interactions with patients.” Readers intrigued by inside accounts of the medical profession by practitioners such as Oliver Sacks will find this a thought-provoking complement. *(Self-published)*


REARVIEW
A Psychiatrist Reflects on Practice and Advocacy In a Time of Healthcare System Change
BARRY B. PERLMAN M.D.

## Lifestyle

### Food & Cooking

#### Tin to Table: Fancy, Snacky Recipes for Tin-thusiasts and A-fish-ionados

**Anna Hezel.** Chronicle, $24.95 (192p) ISBN 978-1-79721-551-8

“There’s never been a more exciting or auspicious time to eat tinned seafood,” asserts *Epicurious* editor Hezel (*Lasagna*) in this fun outing. She pushes her creativity to find ways of turning simple cans of seafood into exciting fare such as spicy sardine toasts with caramelized shallot and fennel jam, marinated French lentil and smoked trout salad, and a triple pickle smoked salmon butter sandwich. Equally enticing are her takes on the classics, among them the tuna melt, whipped potato cod dip, and fish and chips for one. Between the more in-depth recipes, Hezel provides plenty of quick ideas for enjoying these pantry staples: leftover bagna cauda (an anchovy-garlic dip) can be tossed with roasted broccoli and chickpeas, and for a no-cook bite, one can sprinkle parsley and paprika directly into a tin of octopus. Tinned fish novices and aficionados alike will appreciate Hezel’s guide to her favorite products (Trader Joe’s Farm Raised Smoked Trout in Canola Oil is one of her go-tos) and helpful tips (because they are semipreserved, unopened salt-packed anchovies should be stored in the fridge and used within two-to-three months). Whether readers are looking to jazz up some standbys or want to add more seafood to their diet, there’s plenty of inspiration to be found here. *Agent: Angela Miller, Miller Bowers Literary. (Apr.)*

#### Pulp: A Practical Guide to Cooking with Fruit

**Abra Berens.** Chronicle, $35 (432p) ISBN 978-1-79720-714-8

After tackling vegetables in *Ruffage* and beans and grains in *Grist*, Michigan chef Berens turns her focus to Midwestern fruit in this rewarding outing. She kicks off with a handy “baker’s toolkit” of elements such as bread doughs, cake batters, honeycomb brittle, and pickling brine. The bulk of the no-nonsense recipes are then arranged by fruit, from apples to drupelet berries (raspberries, blackberries, and mulberries) to melons, then subdivided by cooking technique and sorted into savory or sweet. Berens has a knack for improving familiar dishes: salads of apples, arugula, and goat cheese with pumpernickel croutons should be built in layers on a serving platter to ensure equal distribution, while a chocolate pudding is kicked up with the addition of cherries that have been soaked in coffee syrup. After “you’ve grazed to boredom” on raw blueberries, use them in a baked dish of chicken and corn bread. Innovative combinations abound: pears meet bacon and onion in a tart, cream for panna cotta is infused with parsnips, and cantaloupe halves are filled with ice cream and drizzled with olive oil. Many recipes are for full meals, including the tempting “Sunday at the Pub,” which consists of poached quince, duck breast, potatoes, and citrusy relish. Locally focused but widely applicable, this will have home chefs heading to the farmers market or produce aisle with renewed confidence. *(Apr.)*

#### Sweet Enough: A Baking Book

**Alison Roman.** Clarkson Potter, $35 (304p) ISBN 978-1-984826-39-8

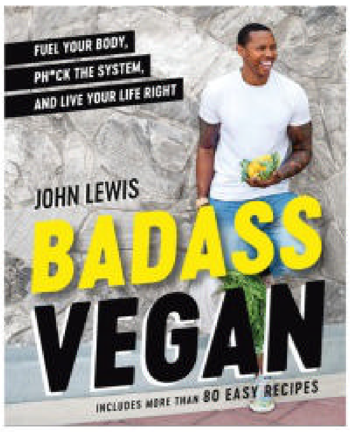
Roman (*Nothing Fancy*) exhibits her signature style in her brassy if unfocused latest, which aims to prove that “desserts, baking, whatever we want to call it here… should be for anyone, at any time, requiring little more than two hands and a modicum of patience.” Often rejecting standardized recipes in favor of meandering essays, Roman brazenly declares meringue no good and provides a list of baking loves/hates with the subtlety of a middle schooler’s slam book. Recipes for tried-and-true items such as pineapple upside down cake and banana bread are hardly novelties, but Roman’s quirky voice is the real draw. Ginger cake, for example, has “a pleasant mustiness, like finding yourself alone in the back halls of a museum,” while a chapter titled “I’ve Got All This Fruit, Now What?” suggests sugaring raspberries and swirling them with sour cream. There are some baffling choices, however: Roman includes Nora Ephron’s bread pudding from *Heartburn*, then notes that she found the results merely passable. Confusingly, given the title, the book includes a chapter on savory items, such as a mushroom pot pie with buttery double crust. It’s not purely a baking book, either, with instructions for making frozen yogurt and coffee granita. The haphazardness of it all makes this feel like it’s more about Roman than the recipes. *(Mar.)*

## Health & Fitness

### Badass Vegan: Fuel Your Body, Ph*ck the System, and Live Your Life Right

**John Lewis, with Rachel Holtzman.** Avery, $35 (320p) ISBN 978-0-593-42073-7

“Being healthy is a right, not a hobby,” contends Lewis, who was a butcher before becoming a vegan, in his pragmatic debut. He surveys the benefits of “becoming a badass vegan” and warns that diets high in meat, milk, and eggs lead to plaque buildup and eventually heart disease. The livestock industry, Lewis explains, contributes to deforestation and sucks up significant water resources; therefore, going vegan is also better for the planet. Pushing back against common misconceptions, he explains that lentils and seitan have more than enough protein to compensate for not eating meat and that athletes can thrive on a plant-based diet, as Serena Williams and NBA star Chris Paul have demonstrated. Elsewhere, Lewis positions veganism as a social justice issue, condemning the federal subsidies for meat and dairy production that prop up the fast food industry, whose restaurants pervade Black communities that lack access to more nutritious food and contribute to residents’ high levels of hypertension, cholesterol, and cardiac disease. The examination of how veganism intersects with food justice issues enlightens, and readers will appreciate the dozens of recipes, including a panzanella salad and St. Louis barbecue that uses jackfruit instead of pulled pork. Those curious about veganism will find this a powerful resource. *(Mar.)*



## Hobbies & Crafts

### Design and Create Contemporary Tableware: Making Pottery You Can Use

**Linda Bloomfield and Sue Pryke.** Herbert, $40 (224p) ISBN 978-1-78994-072-5

In this visually appealing if daunting guide, ceramicists Bloomfield (*Colour in Glazes*) and Pryke show how to make pottery tableware inspired by the “simple shapes with clean lines” of modern Scandinavian design. The authors outline their approach alongside photos showing the principles in action, suggesting that readers limit their palette to a few soft colors and providing images of bowls in white, gray, and pale pink and blue. Brief instructions on how to make bowls, mugs, plates, and teapots will leave novices in the dark, though. For example, the authors contend that “pinch pots can be made larger by adding coils, scoring the rim of the pot and adding slip to attach each coil,” but they neglect to explain how to score clay or add coils. However, the bountiful photos illustrating the major steps of each project are useful if incomprehensive. Additionally, experienced potters will appreciate the helpful nuggets sprinkled throughout (to add handles to a pot, the handle and pot should be at the same state of dryness when joined), as well as the in-depth survey of methods for applying finish (to make a matte glaze more glassy, the authors suggest adding quartz to it). This is best suited for experienced ceramicists looking to elevate their craft. *(Apr.)*

## Home & Garden

### The Joy of Home

**Ashley Gilbreath.** Gibbs Smith, $47 (240p) ISBN 978-1-4236-6343-0

Interior designer Gilbreath outlines her “genteel” approach to decorating in her stylish debut. She credits her mother for giving her an eye for “practicality and warmheartedness” and her father for “respect for tradition,” and shows how these principles guide her designs. Balance, Gilbreath contends, is essential, and she details how she combined elegance and functionality in a dining room by pairing fabric that’s stain and wear resistant on host chairs with leather side chairs that are tasteful while being durable enough to survive “spaghetti nights and chocolate-covered fingers.” Preaching moderation when it comes to color (“A little can go a long way!”), she shows how she incorporated coral pink accents throughout a house (a rug in the kitchen, lamps in the dining room, and drapes near the backdoor) to “create cohesion while also injecting a bit of levity.” Gilbreath emphasizes that she likes to draw on “clients’ histories and memories” and reflect their personal styles in her work, but she offers disappointingly few details on how client tastes and background influenced the houses depicted. Still, the designs are handsome and restrained, and her breakdown of her thought process enlightens (“Visual separation of an open plan is key,” she writes about using a dining table to split two sitting areas in a living room). It’s an attractive volume, if one hobbled by some notable omissions. *(Apr.)*

### Veg Out: A Stress-Free Guide to Creating Your First Vegetable Garden

**Heather Rodino.** Union Square, $16.99 trade paper (192p) ISBN 978-1-4549-4480-5

This comprehensive primer by Rodino (*How to Houseplant*) shows readers how to grow their own vegetables, “from selecting a spot for your garden and navigating seed catalogs to dealing with pests and harvesting your first crops.” She covers the basics, including how to work around regional restraints (gardeners in colder climes can elongate their growing season by starting seeds indoors), where to plant one's garden (the location should receive "six or more hours of direct sunlight per day"), and what type of soil to use (loam is the best, but such shallow-rooted crops as corn and lettuce can grow in silt). Outlining the pros and cons of planting in raised beds or the ground, she notes that the former option usually has fewer weeds but requires more frequent watering while the latter is cheaper to set up but harder to protect from pests. Plant profiles detail the ideal conditions for a variety of vegetables; for example, broccoli requires cool temperatures and lots of space, while carrots thrive in loose soil. Rodino's straightforward style and thorough look at every stage of the growing process will encourage even the most trepidatious new gardener to pick up a trowel. This has all one needs to get started. *(Mar.)*

## Parenting

### Fat Talk: Parenting in the Age of Diet Culture

**Virginia Sole-Smith.** Holt, $29.99 (384p) ISBN 978-1-250-83121-7

This compassionate manual by journalist Sole-Smith (*The Eating Instinct*) suggests ways parents can help their children "recognize and reject" anti-fat bias. She explores how messaging that devalues fat bodies damages children's health, self-esteem, and sense of bodily autonomy through accounts of parents and their kids. "We need to separate weight and health," she contends, telling the story of an eight-year-old girl who received compliments from strangers about the weight she lost due to undiagnosed type 1 diabetes while her heavier and healthier younger sister received only disapproving comments. Critiquing the overlooked environmental factors that contribute to fatness, Sole-Smith reports on research that found childhood asthma to be associated with adolescent weight gain and calls for public health strategies to focus on alleviating poverty, which leaves many families unable to afford healthy food. She urges parents to talk with teachers, doctors, and their kids about pushing back on anti-fat stigma and encourages parents to tell their children that their value isn't tied to their weight: "Your body is never the problem." The eye-opening research upends conventional assumptions about what a healthy body looks like, and readers will appreciate the affirming tone. The result is a striking challenge to fatphobia. *(Apr.)*

### Advanced Parenting: Advice for Helping Kids through Diagnoses, Differences, and Mental Health Challenges

**Kelly Fradin.** Balance, $29 (336p) ISBN 978-1-5387-2246-6

In this helpful guide, pediatrician Fradin (*Parenting in a Pandemic*) serves up advice for parents of children who face such health challenges as organ transplants, severe allergies, sensory disorders, or mental illness. She focuses on how to stay resilient through hard times and what parents should know about the medical system, explaining how pediatricians allot their time (10-minute appointments for sick children vs. 25 minutes for the healthy, who are usually seeking annual physicals that require comprehensive health assessments) and how insurance reimbursements affect their priorities (emails, school forms, and prescription refills are usually low priority because they are unpaid). To educate oneself about a child's condition, Fradin recommends readers start by consulting their doctors, after which they might seek out information from an advocacy organization or read up on the publications of a "scientific or educational leader in the field of interest." The author also offers suggestions on coping with the emotional consequences of a diagnosis, encouraging parents to fight burnout by keeping a fulfilling social life and to make sure one's child feels comfortable opening up about bullying related to their medical condition. The advice manages the difficult feat of providing specific guidance while applying broadly to the myriad conditions a child might face. Thoughtful and practical, this delivers. *(Apr.)*

### Raising Kids Who Care: Practical Conversations for Exploring Stuff that Matters, Together

**Susy Lee.** 598Press, $5.99 e-book (291p) ASIN B0971FTPXR

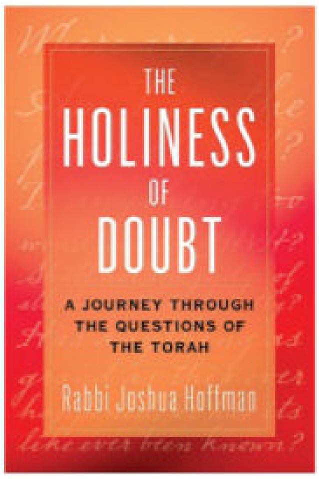
Lee, a former family consultant for churches, debuts with an empathetic program for how parents can facilitate thoughtful conversations with their children. She outlines a conversation template for discussing relationships, culture, "inner selves," and one's purpose, suggesting readers break down their talks into six steps: identify conversation goals, think through the major issues up for discussion, and prepare ahead of time, then conduct the conversation, recap, and implement lessons learned. For example, to help kids differentiate between needs and wants, Lee recommends families place sticky notes on the household items they couldn't live without and then discuss everyone's choices, asking, "Did anything stand out or surprise you?" and considering if items that weren't tagged might be donated. Other conversation prompts describe how to explore what families can do to make a difference in the lives of others, how to be a good friend, and what screen time limits are appropriate for one's family. The primary virtue of Lee's framework is its flexibility, offering a structure for considering a broad variety of topics. However, her silence on how to resolve disagreements that might arise from the discussion of "critical social issues" (sections focus on ameliorating poverty and climate change) feels like an oversight. Still, parents will appreciate the advice. *(Self-published)*

## Religion/Spirituality

### The Holiness of Doubt: A Journey Through the Questions of the Torah

**Joshua Hoffman.** Rowman & Littlefield, $32 (240p) ISBN 978-1-5381-7675-7

In this enlightening debut, rabbi Hoffman argues that the Torah can be better understood through questions the text itself poses, starting in Genesis with the snake's provocation of Eve. The Torah's questions are "more than literary devices," Hoffman explains, and asking them is "as sacred... as expressing absolute faith." God's first question of Adam and Eve in the garden—"Where are you?"—might seem odd coming from an "all-knowing" being, but his intention, Hoffman writes, was to inspire



self-reflection and compel Adam and Eve to "take responsibility for [their] actions"; eventually their fear of God "will be transformed into confidence and loyalty." Before God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah, his query "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" demonstrated he was "grappling with the potential for goodness in the face of total wickedness," and, as such, implicitly grants humans "permission to ask questions of God… because God models that behavior." Ideal for synagogue study groups and curious believers, this offering advances an attitude toward doubt that's freeing but purposeful—textual questions exist in order to help readers "confront… uncertainty" and enrich their faith. Jewish readers eager to take their Torah study a step further should have a look. *(May)*

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### Why the Gospel?

**Matthew W. Bates.** Eerdmans, $17.99 trade paper (198p) ISBN 978-0-80-288168-7

"God has given us the gospel. But for what ultimate purpose and final reasons?" wonders Bates (*The Gospel Precisely*), a theology professor at Quincy University, in this flawed entry. First, Bates spells out what the gospel isn't—an assurance that belief is a get-into-heaven-free card. Instead, its purpose is to proclaim Jesus's sovereignty. Bates writes that believers must recognize Jesus's "royal authority" or else risk worshipping "bankrupt idols" such as "money, power, [and] sex." After accepting Jesus as king, the faithful should glorify him by praying, giving themselves over to God emotionally, and especially by making disciples of those of "different nations, ethnicities, and cultures," just as Jesus welcomed a diverse swath of peoples into his fold. Bates also discusses how to recruit and retain church members in an "increasingly secular landscape" in which it's "trendier to dismantle traditional Christianity than embrace it." Interventions can entail "wrestling with big questions" in church discussion groups, or joining up with like-minded disciple makers for support. While Bates brings ample enthusiasm to this outing, his argument too often grows repetitive, circling back to the same several points rather than delving deeper into practical applications. Only already devoted believers will find this useful. *(May)*

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### The Beauty of the Hebrew Letter: From Sacred Scroll to Graffiti

**Izzy Pludwinski.** Brandeis Univ., $50 (240p) ISBN 978-1-68458-146-7

Calligrapher and Torah scroll scribe Pludwinski (*Mastering Hebrew Calligraphy*) charts how depictions of the Hebrew alphabet have evolved over the millennia in this elegant survey. The author explains his craft's appeal, in that "a truly beautiful [Hebrew] letter, word, or composition… will possess a dynamism, an internal life force." Letters must adhere to precise stylistic requirements for Jewish ritualistic purposes—a handwritten Torah scroll with even one imperfect letter is unusable—but Pludwinski shows that these parameters haven't stymied creativity over the 3,000-plus years he covers. He begins in 1000 BCE with Paleo-Hebrew, used during the First Temple period, and demonstrates how the characters became squarer (like modern Hebrew script) in the early part of the Second Temple period. The author differentiates between Ashkenazic (traditionally written with quills) and Sephardic (traditionally written with reeds) styles, noting how Ashkenazic forms lend themselves to decorative lettering, while Sephardic forms are more readable, since the "contrasts between horizontal and vertical strokes are less pronounced." Modern works are also showcased, such as Israeli artist Joseph Hirsch's Jerusalem street signs, along with a section on Hebrew street art. Pludwinski takes pains to depict Hebrew lettering as an ever-evolving art form, and his careful descriptions, replete with fascinating technical detail, illuminate the art without being overwhelming. This is a treat for the eyes and mind. Photos. *(May)*

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### Awakening Your Psychic Ability: A Practical Guide to Develop Your Intuition, Demystify the Spiritual World, and Open Your Psychic Senses

**Lisa Campion.** Reveal, $19.95 trade paper (200p) ISBN 978-1-648-48074-4

Reiki teacher Campion (*The Art of Psychic Reiki*) sets out to help readers sharpen their psychic skills in this comprehensive guide. Hollywood portrayals aside, the author writes, psychic encounters don't entail "shadowy spirits whose motive is to scare the life out of you at 3 A.M." Rather, everyone has some degree of psychic ability, and honing it can lead to spiritual insight. Beginners should start by "tuning in" to their physical and emotional states, recognizing bodily "truth signals" (such as spine-tingling), and trusting initial psychic impressions "even if [they're] weird." Campion outlines different psychic senses, from clairvoyance to lesser-known clairaudience ("hear[ing] psychic phenomena"), and lays out characteristics of each (clairvoyants, for instance, are prone to particularly vivid dreams). As well, she writes that readers can connect to "benevolent" spirit guides such as angels or earth spirits by calling for day-to-day guidance or requesting omens. Campion packs this primer with plenty of useful detail, from dream types to symbols and signs, and takes pains to assure that psychic abilities aren't abnormal or signs of "dark magic." This is perfect for budding psychics eager to take the next step on their spiritual quests. *(May)*

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## ONLINE ONLY

www.publishersweekly.com

### FICTION

**The Fawn** *Magda Szabó, trans. by Len Rix.* New York Review Books, ISBN 978-1-68137-737-7, Mar.

**Francisco** *Alison Mills Newman.* New Directions, ISBN 978-0-8112-3239-5, Mar.

**The Girls** *Edna Ferber.* Belt, ISBN 978-1-953368-55-3, Mar.

★ **Old Babes in the Wood** *Margaret Atwood.* Doubleday, ISBN 978-0-385-54907-3, Mar.

**The Theory of (Not Quite) Everything** *Kara Gnodde.* Harper, ISBN 978-0-06-326601-8, Mar.

**Things We Hide from the Light** *Lucy Score.* Bloom, ISBN 978-1-72827-611-3, Feb.

**The Unfortunates** *JK Chukwu.* Harper, ISBN 978-0-358-65026-3, Feb.

### NONFICTION

**Banzeiro Òkòtó: The Amazon as the Center of the World** *Eliane Brum, trans. by Diane Whitty.* Graywolf, ISBN 978-1-64445-219-6, Mar.

**Bizarro: The Surreal Saga of America's Secret War on Synthetic Drugs and the Florida Kingpins It Captured** *Jordan S. Rubin.* Univ. of California, ISBN 978-0-5203-8795-9, Apr.

# Children's/YA

## Picture Books

### When We Are Apart

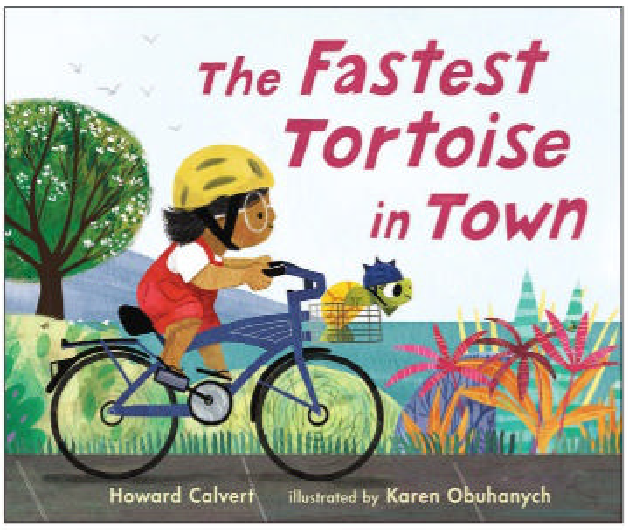
**Becca Johnsey, illus. by Maričan.** BiblioKid, $17.99 (32p) ISBN 978-1-955767-37-8

An unnamed child learns to regulate their feelings around a parent's work-related absence in this approachable picture book written in the second person. Straightforward rhyming lines outline a white-presenting family's home life when "sometimes for work,/ your daddy's away," tracing the child's feelings of frustration and longing ("You miss him so much./ More than you can say") while asking age-appropriate questions about the change ("Why can't he be home?/ When will he come back?"). A moment of sadness and anger leads to the youth knocking over a block tower, and then grounding themself in the form of a hug with Mommy, some deep breaths, a routine snack, and a centering moment with a watch—"a token of his love, when he's not here." A phone call with Dad offers further reassurance, as does an acknowledgment of the situation's difficulty for everyone involved. Subtly working in visual military references, Maričan's fine-lined, mellow-hued digital illustrations reinforce the text's assuring tone. It's a gentle, ritual-based introduction to a difficult-to-grasp concept. An author's note offers background information on the story and provides a list of activities to pass time in a parent's absence. Ages 3–5. *(Self-published)*

### The Fastest Tortoise in Town

**Howard Calvert, illus. by Karen Obuhanych.** Candlewick, $18.99 (32p) ISBN 978-1-5362-2835-9

Anyone who has optimistically signed up for a fun run will see themselves in friendly faced Barbara Hendricks, the "regular leopard tortoise" who narrates this sweetly rendered variation on Aesop's "The Tortoise and the Hare." Barbara is a bundle of nerves ahead of the big day, but she has a champion, too—"my owner and best friend, Lorraine," a bespectacled child portrayed with brown skin—who believes in her unconditionally. Lorraine leads Barbara through a crash-training regimen (they're overtaken by "an absentminded worm" and a newly walking toddler). And on game day, the child encourages the tortoise to "just run your own race." Though Barbara spies a snail, a slow loris, and a sloth ("the fastest animals I've ever seen!") at the starting line, her strategy of putting one foot in front of the other, again and again, pays off. Calvert (*Lots of Frogs*) creates a lovable everytortoise via Barbara's entertaining account, nodding to the original fable with the appearance of a new, long-eared challenger at book's end. In moving mixed-media images of expressive figures and bustling townsfolk portrayed with various skin tones, Obuhanych (*This Little Kitty*) delivers visual laughs and creates a tortoise to root for. Ages 3–7. *(Apr.)*



*Calvert and Obuhanych conjure up a charming Aesop iteration that boasts plenty of determination (reviewed on this page).*

### Who Will U Be?

**Jessica Hische.** Penguin Workshop, $18.99 (48p) ISBN 978-0-593-38502-9

Hische (*Tomorrow I'll Be Kind*) celebrates curiosity and individuality in this playful blend of abecedary, school story, and self-discovery primer. Excited to embark on a field trip, Lilac-hued protagonist U heads to Ms. Bracket's School for Little Letters, located—in the first of many punny nods to Manhattan—in Alphabet City. Shown in varied hues and sporting thin, black noodly arms and legs, the full complement of classmates, plus "Sigma... visiting from Greece," boards the subway, embarking on a New York City scavenger hunt to, well, find themselves—"on storefronts, on street signs, on hand-printed posters, on a movie theater marquee... even up in the sky!" Along the way, U does on-the-street interviews, asking S, T, O, and P how they ended up on a sign, and making small talk with the flashy K on box office signage. A chat with the books at the public library and a stop in front of a lettered sculpture round out the trip, contributing to U's uplifting class report on her findings. An arch-windowed room at the New York Public Library and a showstopping spread of humorous, brightly burning billboards in Times Square are among the memorable scenes of this city jaunt, which invites readers to explore their own world of possibilities. Ages 3–7. *(Apr.)*

### Can You See It? (Sensing Your World #1)

**Susan Verde, illus. by Juliana Perdomo.** Abrams, $15.99 (40p) ISBN 978-1-4197-6163-8

What's the difference between regarding something and truly seeing it? In this first in a new sense-based series, Verde (the I Am series) answers this question via accessible examples that also introduce mindfulness techniques. Out and about on a spring day, a young narrator, portrayed by Perdomo (*El Cucuy Is Scared, Too!*) with dark brown skin, explains that while "looking shows me/ what is right in front of my eyes," slowing down to "notice/ with patience and curiosity... shows me more." In a series of vignettes, the child first looks at a familiar visual (a tree, a city block), then delves into deeper perceptions. At first glance, for example, the sky is home to the sun, clouds, and a passing bird. But further inspection reveals it as "magic": "An invitation to stay in or go out,/ rest or play." Crisp, folk art–flavored digital illustrations skillfully move between observations straightforward and beyond, featuring a cast of various abilities, ages, and skin tones. Bold colors and kinetic swirls of images help covey a sense of wonder in the everyday, emphasizing the book's parting message: "Seeing is the feeling in our bellies/ when we realize the world is full of miracles." An author's note concludes. Ages 4–8. *Agent (for author and illustrator): Erica Rand Silverman, Stimola Literary. (Apr.)*

### The Song That Called Them Home

**David A. Robertson, illus. by Maya McKibbin.** Tundra, $18.99 (52p) ISBN 978-0-73-526670-4

Inspired by Indigenous Turtle Island communities' stories of the memekwesewak ("one of two humanoid races on Mother Earth," per an author's note), Cree author Robertson (*On the Trapline*) tells of two children's harrowing adventure with the mischievous beings. Heading on a summertime "trip to the land with their moshom," siblings Lauren and James, portrayed with brown skin, become hungry and seek to catch a fish when Moshom naps after their arrival. But the canoe drifts from the shore due to Lauren's inexperience, and memekwesewak soon overturn the vessel, spiriting James through a waterfall and to their hidden world. Lauren courageously follows, finding the land of the memekwesewak and joining James in an entrancing fireside song and dance that goes "faster and faster/ for minutes that turned into/ hours that turned into days"—until another song reminiscent of distant thunder thumps in the children's hearts, calling them home. Tinged with mystery and peril, Robertson's adventure underlines a family bond and anchoring traditions, while digitally crafted, kinetic art from McKibbon (*Swift Fox All Along*), who is Ojibwe, Yoeme, and Irish, visualizes the memekwesewak as ghostly underwater creatures surrounded by saturated natural landscapes. Ages 4–8. *(Apr.)*

## Fiction

### Shermy and Shake, the Not So Nice Neighbor (Shermy and Shake #1)

**Kirby Larson, illus. by Shinji Fujioka.** Candlewick, $15.99 (96p) ISBN 978-1-5362-1942-5

An improbable friendship develops

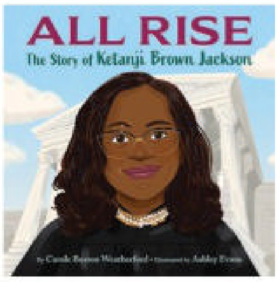
## LIFT EVERY VOICE

**Three picture books center Black voices.**

### All Rise: The Story of Ketanji Brown Jackson

**Carole Boston Weatherford, illus. by Ashley Evans.** Crown, $18.99 (40p) ISBN 978-059-365016-5

Exemplifying how "whatever she did, wherever she was, Ketanji Brown Jackson rose to the top," Boston Weatherford starts each spread of this high-level biography with a nod to Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise"—the poem that Brown Jackson (b. 1970) quoted during her confirmation to the U.S. Supreme Court. Play-by-play lines reflect her maturation, reference her heritage ("the dedication and determination of her parents"), and show Brown Jackson navigating limitations and prejudice placed on her by others ("She rose/ above the debate judges who mocked her African name... She rose/ above a guidance counselor's doubts that she could get into Harvard"). Evans's unlined digital illustrations visualize, in pastel clouds, the figure's connections to elders including Shirley Chisholm and Mae Jemison. It's an inspiring biography focused on rising above challenges. A "Letter to My Granddaughter and All of Our Daughters" and timeline conclude. Ages 4–8. *(Feb.)*



### You So Black

**Theresa tha S.O.N.G.B.I.R.D., illus. by London Ladd.** S&S/Millner, $18.99 (48p) ISBN 978-166-590034-8

S.O.N.G.B.I.R.D. transmutes her spoken-word poem of the same name into a reflective and rousing picture book celebration of Blackness. Expansive initial lines turn the titular phrase into a series of affirmations, kicking off: "You so Black, when you smile, the stars come out./ You so Black, when you're born,/ the god come out." Subsequent "Black is" statements describe the word both via specifics ("brilliant," "strong") and by embracing its multiplicity of meanings ("adjective,/ adverb,/ color, /and noun"). Employing a vibrant palette, Ladd's mixed-media collage depicts dark-complected Black figures—varying ages, body types, hairstyles, and skin tones appear throughout—against saturated, stained glass–like backdrops that include visuals of pyramids and the night sky. On one page, a child in a unicorn shirt holds a star-topped wand ("Black is grace"); another highlights a civil rights demonstration ("Black is tough.../ Black is hard to do!"). It's a potently messaged poem thoughtfully rendered. Ages 4–8. *(Jan.)*

### Lift Every Voice and Change: A Celebration of Black Leaders and the Words That Inspire Generations (A Sound Book)

**Charnaie Gordon, illus. by Aeron Cargill.** Becker & Mayer, $18.99 (32p) ISBN 978-076-037459-7

In an interactive picture book that features brief audio clips, the creators honor public Black American individuals who have used their voices to, per an opening note, "help challenge thoughts and ideas or speak out against unfairness and injustices." Dedicating a spread each to 12 prominent figures, including Stacey Abrams, James Baldwin, Stokely Carmichael, Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter, John Lewis, Toni Morrison, and Ayo Tometi, Gordon supplies a cursory biography of each, alongside a quote—also provided via audio—and an interactive callout box that ends with a question ("How can you be like John Lewis to help inspire your country or community?"). Realistic full-color portraits by Cargill seem to capture each figure mid-action: Baldwin gestures over a cup of coffee, Lewis stands in front of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, Morrison pauses over an open notebook. It's a straightforward biographical packaging that challenges readers to hone their own voices. Back matter includes a glossary and further reading suggestions. Ages 7–12. *(Jan.)*

over summer vacation in this understated slice-of-life story from Larson (the Audacity Jones books). The beginnings of Shermy's school break are unassuming, involving bickering with his older sister, fielding gentle reprimands about not wearing his glasses, and dutifully completing chores. Things take a sudden turn, however, when Shermy meets the neighbor's visiting grandson, Shake, who in short order claims to be from both Jupiter and Walla Walla, then gobbles the last Toaster Tart in Shermy's kitchen. Shermy, who enjoys orderly pursuits including puzzles and reading slowly (to "taste every word"), finds much irritating about energetic Shake, who loses a favorite Frisbee, enters Shermy's room without knocking, and spoils the plot of a half-finished book. But an organic companionship nevertheless slowly builds between them, taking root across brief episodes that give tender credence to Shermy's frustration and Shake's desire to connect. Shake helps manage Shermy's disappointment when a Fourth of July celebration falls flat, and Shermy starts to appreciate Shake as a lonely child parted from his honeymooning mother. Earnestly told, low-conflict vignettes affirm the compassion and understanding that friendship can require to bloom. Occasional b&w illustrations from debut illustrator Fujioka show the protagonists with pale skin. Ages 6–9. *Author's agent: Jill Grinberg, Jill Grinberg Literary Management. Illustrator's agent: Lori Kilkelly, LK Literary. (May)*

## Jude Saves the World

**Ronnie Riley.** Scholastic Press, $18.99 (272p) ISBN 978-1-3388-5587-6

Jude Winters, a white 12-year-old who's nonbinary and bisexual, feels completely safe only with best friend Dallas Knight, who is gay and Black. Even so, when white-cued schoolmate Stevie Morgan, a former soccer star, is ousted from a popular clique, and rumors swirl that she's queer, Jude and Dallas offer their friendship. Having a second pal, especially one as fun as Stevie, changes Jude's life for the better and inspires Jude to create a safe space for marginalized people in their hometown. At the same time, Jude's ADHD makes it difficult to concentrate in the classroom, and they're frustrated with their worried mom's request that they not come out to her parents, leading to misgendering and deadnaming by their grandparents. How can Jude make a difference when so many things are out of their control? Jude is an endearingly earnest narrator, and their supportive bond with Dallas—which debut author Riley contrasts against a toxic former friendship of Stevie's—models healthy, consensual, enthusiastic camaraderie. Though the novel's many elements never completely coalesce, the kids eventually find a broader LGBTQ support network, learning more about queer history and identities along the way. It's a gently inclusive, relationally positive read that touches on symbiotic associations. An author's note and queer glossary conclude. Ages 8–12. *Agent: Andrea Walker and Jennifer Azantian, Azantian Literary Agency. (Apr.)*

## ★ The Manifestor Prophecy (Nic Blake and the Remarkables #1)

**Angie Thomas, illus. by Setor Fiadzigbey.** HarperCollins/Balzer + Bray, $19.99 (368p) ISBN 978-0-06-322513-8

"NOTHING SHORT OF A TRIUMPH." —RICK RIORDAN
ANGIE THOMAS
#1 New York Times Bestselling Author of THE HATE U GIVE
NIC BLAKE AND THE REMARKABLES
THE MANIFESTOR PROPHECY

In Jackson, Miss., homeschooled Nichole Blake is hoping that her single father will finally train her in her Gift as a Manifestor—the most powerful tier of the supernaturally gifted Remarkables, whose innate abilities originate with Africa's Wallinzi tribe. After another Remarkable summons a vision for Nic's 12th birthday—one that turns quickly terrifying—Nic's deeply wary dad forbids her from attending a high-profile book signing. But when Nic goes against his wishes, she discovers something extraordinary: world-famous children's book author TJ Retro is not only also a Manifestor, he's her godfather, and the books she's obsessed with are based in truth. As Nic's developing Gift begins to wreak havoc, and the family secrets her father has kept catch up with them, Nic encounters a prophecy that promises the destruction of the Remarkable world unless a Chosen One can intervene. Thomas (*Concrete Rose*) brings her trademark voice to an action-packed series kickoff rooted in a mixture of African diasporic myth, biblical references, and U.S. history. Imbuing characters both brave and sweetly vulnerable with unflappable senses of humor amid harrowing circumstances, Thomas creates an elaborate supernatural mythology that boldly confronts fantasy tropes and questions of forgiveness. B&w art by Fiadzigbey (*Bunheads*) appears throughout. Protagonists are Black. Ages 8–12. *Agent: Molly Ker Hawn, Bent Agency. (Apr.)*

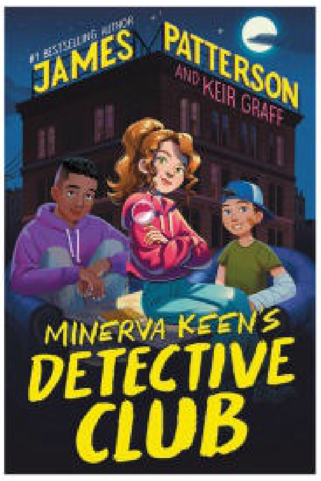
## Sam Makes a Splash (The House on Sunrise Lagoon #1)

**Nicole Melleby.** Algonquin, $16.99 (224p) ISBN 978-1-643753-10-2

In this joyful series opener set on an idyllic New Jersey lagoon, 11-year-old Samantha Ali-O'Connor vows to save her Mom's struggling boat charter and repair business as a way to "solidify her place" in her bustling adoptive family. Alongside 11-year-old Harbor, nine-year-old Marina (who's also adopted), seven-year-old twins Cordelia and Lir, Mom, and schoolteacher Mama, Sam is both the most recent addition to the Ali-O'Connor household and the only member who can't swim, which, despite her moms' assurances, distresses her. Accidentally overhearing her parents discussing their strained finances, Sam realizes that her dream of taking over the family company is in jeopardy, and she launches a secret campaign to attract business before summer's end. But Sam quickly discovers that she needs help, and she turns to four-months-older Harbor, with whom she shares an intense rivalry, as well as the Badger brothers, who spend summers across the lagoon. Moments of madcap humor and familial warmth characterize this emotionally generous summer tale from Melleby (*Camp QUILTBAG*), which showcases the author's command of fully realized characterization and distinct relationship dynamics. Most characters read as white; the twins share Mama's Syrian genes. Publishing simultaneously: *Marina in the Middle (The House on Sunrise Lagoon #2).* Ages 8–12. *Agent: Jim McCarthy, Dystel, Goderich & Bourret. (May)*

### Minerva Keen's Detective Club (Minerva Keen #1)

**James Patterson and Keir Graff.** Little, Brown/Patterson, $16.99 (336p) ISBN 978-0-316-41223-0



Red herrings and gross-out humor abound in this approachable, *Only Murders in the Building*-esque whodunit by Patterson (the Middle School series) and Graff (*The Phantom Tower*), which is centered on the Arcanum, a landmark Chicago apartment building that's "a magnet for people who are different and weird." Visiting Melbourne on business, the mathematician father and philosopher mother of Minerva Keen have left the 12-year-old and her accident-prone 11-year-old brother, Heck, in the care of distracted older cousin Bizzy. When their elderly neighbor Kermit collapses in an apparent poisoning while playing chess with Minerva, she becomes a potential suspect, questioned by Detective Taylor. Interested in helping with the case, Minerva soon employs her "superior brainpower" to do some sleuthing of her own, enlisting the help of both Heck and schoolmate "Silent Santos" Salgado. As poisonings continue in the building, the junior detectives race to find the perpetrator while evading the Arcanum's malevolent building manager. Though the puzzle's solution comes out of left field, wonderfully quirky characters, slapstick buffoonery, and smart pacing propel this rambunctious detective story—and its charismatic narrator—into a dynamic mystery. The Keen family reads as white, Detective Taylor has brown skin; context clues suggest diversity across the secondary cast. Ages 8–12. *Agents: (for Patterson) Robert Barnett, Williams and Connelly LLP; (for Graff) Josh Gertzler, Hannigan Gertzler Literary. (May)*

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### Two Friends, One Dog, and a Very Unusual Week

**Sarah L. Thomson, illus. by Vin Vogel.** Peachtree, $16.99 (240p) ISBN 978-1-68263-516-2

Nine-year-old Emily Robbins and her family share an apartment building with its manager, Mr. Armand, who keeps chickens, and another family, whose chiding mother leaves rules-based reminders around the building. Emily's life is turned upside-down when a talkative girl named Rani moves solo into the building's unoccupied attic with her massive black dog, Otto. Rani, whose wildlife photographer mother is working in Patagonia, says she's never been to school and cites time spent in Antarctica and Borneo. Rani exhibits a freewheeling, Pippi Longstocking–like perspective—creating a slide in her quarters, building an immediate rapport with local adults, and demonstrating an unusual understanding of social constructs and norms—but her hijinks eventually lead to trouble with various rule-intent adults, as when Otto is taken away because he lacks tags. Fast-paced episodes, nimbly captured in b&w comic-strip-style cartoons from Vogel (*Too Much Slime!*), keep things moving as Thomson (*Wombat Underground*) showcases Rani's vivid imagination and, in affectionate prose, the way her welcoming attitude brings community to the fore. Emily's family is white; Rani is described as having brown skin and black curls. Ages 8–12. *(Apr.)*

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### A Breath of Mischief

**MarcyKate Connolly, illus. by Yuta Onoda.** Sourcebooks, $16.99 (224p) ISBN 978-1-7282-5686-3

Narrator Aria, who is pale with blue-tinged skin and hair, has long lived with the Wind, which claims her as their daughter. It's a life the young windling loves—dwelling in a floating cloud castle and traversing the world with young gryphling companion Gwyn—until Aria awakens one morning to air unmoved by the slightest breeze. The castle is grounded, its aviary chimes have gone missing, and the Wind cannot be summoned. Heading west to seek the element, Aria and Gwyn find the Wind trapped within a vast, overgrown estate in a machine of glass and metal. The creation's inventor, Worton, claims to be bringing harmony to the world, and offers a bargain: if Aria retrieves three fabled treasures before the moon wanes, Worton will free the Wind. Deprived of their customary ease of travel, Aria and Gwyn undergo terrifying challenges, encounter youths connected with the other elements—Fire, Earth, and Water—and together fight against a hidden agenda that's poised to doom the land. For fans of Hayao Miyazaki, this straightforwardly plotted, elementally anchored adventure quest from Connolly (the Hollow Dolls duology) couples cloud turrets and terrestrial wonder with a memorable tone and an ecologically aware narrative. Final art not seen by *PW*. Ages 8–13. *Author's agent: Suzie Townsend, New Leaf Literary. (Apr.)*

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### The Amazon (The Wildes #1)

**Roland Smith.** Sleeping Bear, $17.95 (240p) ISBN 978-1-534111-94-3

When their mother disappears in the Amazon rainforest while researching golden lion tamarins, two siblings leave base camp to seek her in this uneven, environmentally conscious mystery. Resourceful, fact-savvy Asia Wilde, 13, and fearless Ring, 11, are often left to their own devices by their ambitious parents, but Asia's field notebooks betray a yearning for regular school over global homeschooling. Their conservation-biologist mother frequently goes off-grid during field work, and their veterinarian father operates a massive Texas animal park, specializing in conserving rare and endangered animals. Currently staying with their mother south of Altamira near Brazil's Xingu River, the kids wake to find they've been deserted by their camp crew and their mom is missing from her zipline-connected network of treetop research platforms. The nearest adult is their dithering tutor, until the arrival of an Indigenous Kayapo man, Raoni, who holds an advanced degree in cultural anthropology and conservation biology, and who helps the children after wildlife-cam footage deepens the mystery. Though Raoni's undercover impersonation of "an ignorant Kayapo" strikes a strange note, thrilling, high-stakes escape scenes propel the plot and eco-justice message as Smith (*The Switch*) reveals the terrible damage inflicted by government and industry on Indigenous lands and wildlife habitats. Ages 9–10. *(Apr.)*

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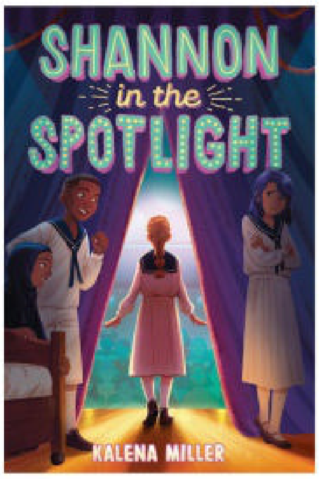
### Arthur, the Always King

**Kevin Crossley-Holland, illus. by Chris Riddell.** Candlewick Studio, $29.99 (240p) ISBN 978-1-5362-1265-5

Spanning King Arthur's enchanted birth to the king's disappearance at the lake where he received Excalibur, Crossley-Holland (*Norse Myths*) recounts myriad Arthurian legends in this evocative, episodic telling. Intricately detailed full-page artwork by Riddell (*Pirate Stew*), rendered in swathes of muted color highlighted by regal blues and vivid gold, accompanies succinct literary text. Chapters are aptly titled according to their content: for example, in "Arthur's Childhood," the creators depict Arthur's mother, Ygerna, Duchess of Cornwall, giving birth to the babe before the magician Merlin whisks him away, "over the jagged sea cliff. In the almost dark," to foster parents Sir Ector and Lady Margery. "The Fellowship of the Round Table" follows the founding of the society and presents the seven trials faced by Arthur and his knights to achieve greatness. Subsequent tales detail these trials, Excalibur's retrieval, and the story of the Green Knight. The creators maintain outdated interpretations of women found in the Arthurian inspiration material. This lyrically developed, if standard, story of adventure, magic, and intrigue underlines the idea, outlined in an introduction, that the Always King's legend endures because it's "about human beings, not about gods or supermen and superwomen." Ages 10–up. *(Apr.)*

### Shannon in the Spotlight

**Kalena Miller.** Delecorte, $16.99 (272p) ISBN 978-0-593-48605-4



Obsessive-compulsive disorder, complex tween relationships, and finding one's niche take center stage in this delicately realized novel from Miller (*The Night When No One Had Sex*). In suburban Minneapolis, white 12-year-old Shannon Carter has always kept her love of musical theater behind the scenes, staying within her comfort zone as a techie. But when the director of her community theater's production of *The Sound of Music* hears her sing and demands that she audition, Shannon finds herself cast as Brigitta von Trapp—the role coveted by one of her best friends. As Shannon moves forward into rehearsals, her OCD presents new challenges, a rival production increases pressure, and her critical grandmother temporarily moves in after a house fire—taking Shannon's bed, and clashing with her single mother about parenting and Shannon's OCD. On top of all that, she becomes interested in Black-cued Micah, the assured new boy cast as Kurt in her production. Miller, who lives with OCD, employs a conversational first-person voice, relaying self-aware Shannon's endeavors to balance her mental health, her newfound confidence, and her desire to keep the peace, while emotionally profound themes elevate a low-stakes plot. Context cues suggest a racially diverse secondary cast. Ages 10–up. *Agent: Stacey Kondla, Rights Factory. (Apr.)*

### The Hitherto Secret Experiments of Marie Curie

**Edited by Bryan Thomas Schmidt and Henry Herz.** Blackstone, $18.99 (358p) ISBN 978-1-6650-4703-6

Via myriad fantastical situations boasting magic, supernatural creatures, and time travel, 20 chilling short stories and poems by authors including Sarah Beth Durst, Jonathan Maberry, Jo Whittemore, and others center pioneering physicist Marie Curie (1867–1934), born Marya Salomea Skłodowska. The anthology kicks off with background information on Curie's life and a history of late 19th- and early 20th-century Poland, providing enriching context for the stories that follow. Jane Yolen's entry, "Dark Lady, Salomea," imagines the scientist's thoughts on her innovations' consequences in concise verse ("Do the lives lost, gained,/ weigh equal in your heart?/ Or do you just polish/ the medals and move on"). In "Mayra's Monster," Alethea Kontis sees Curie contending with a monster sent from the enigmatic darkness to frighten her. Some stories delve into Curie's personal experiences, while others primarily spotlight her scientific endeavors as seen through the lens of sci-fi and fantasy buffs. Despite the volume's genre-spanning fare, entries can feel somewhat narratively repetitive. Nevertheless, contributors coherently spin tales that ambitiously explore themes of grief, loss, occupation and oppression, and systemic misogyny. Those inspired by Curie's accomplishments will find much to enjoy in this intriguing work. Ages 12–17. *(Apr.)*

### Lion's Legacy (Tennessee Russo #1)

**L.C. Rosen.** Union Square, $18.99 (304p) ISBN 978-1-4549-4805-6

A gay teen pairs up with his estranged treasure hunter father to seek out a Grecian artifact in this gripping series kickoff from Rosen (*Lavender House*) that's both thrilling escapade and simmering romance. White Jewish 17-year-old Tennessee Russo and his renowned archaeologist father, Henry Johnson, haven't spoken for two years following a fight over the proper guardianship of the artifacts they uncover: while Henry feels that those with money are best able to protect these objects, Ten believes that it's wrong to remove them from their native country. But when Henry appears with a proposal to track down a magical item rumored as once belonging to an army of queer Greek soldiers, Ten agrees. In Athens, Henry hires 17-year-old Athenian Leo, a queer history buff, to be their translator, and there's an immediate spark between the two teens. After they discover that Henry's excavation partner wants the artifact for themselves, Henry, Ten, and Leo must race against the clock to find it first. Through Ten and Leo's visits to a museum of queer history and culture, and the meticulous detail with which the author recounts underreported events in Grecian history, Rosen makes an insistent case for recognizing and teaching LGBTQ history and understanding legacy. Ages 12–17. *(May)*

### ★ If I See You Again Tomorrow

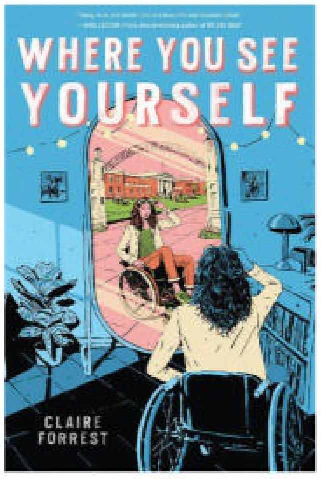
**Robbie Couch.** Simon & Schuster, $19.99 (336p) ISBN 978-1-5344-9749-8

Couch (*Blaine for the Win*) couples a vivacious queer romance with an emotionally intelligent time loop tale, meshing *Groundhog Day* with *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. For reasons he does not understand, high school senior Clark Huckleton, described as having olive skin, has had to endure the same lousy day in suburban Illinois—September 19—310 times. He repeatedly attends therapy; longs for his best friend, who is living her best life after a move to Texas; and navigates anger with his mother for initiating a divorce with his father. The time loop's monotony shatters when handsome Beau Dupont, a Black biracial teen, interrupts Clark's trigonometry class, engaging in disruptive hijinks that establish him as everything that introverted Clark is not. When Beau flees school in a teacher's car and Clark agrees to tag along, the two explore Chicago together, skinny-dipping and visiting a vintage movie theater. Clark quickly realizes that either Beau "is stuck in my today. Or, I'm stuck in his," but after their initial encounter, Beau seems oddly intent on avoiding him. Their day-after-day cat-and-mouse game, which never feels dull despite repeating events, eloquently explores themes of loneliness, love and forgiveness, and the quiet power of kindness, all while maintaining ticking-clock suspense. Ages 12–up. *Agent: Moe Ferrara, BookEnds Literary. (Apr.)*

### ★ Where You See Yourself

**Claire Forrest.** Scholastic Press, $19.99 (320p) ISBN 978-1-338-81383-8

A teen with cerebral palsy combats ableist school administrators while searching for the perfect college in Forrest's refreshing and empowering debut. Because of her high school's poor accessibility compliance, wheelchair user and senior Effie Galanos is used to her mother stepping in to campaign for proper accommodations. Effie's mom, knowing she won't be there to help her daughter at college, compiles a list of wheelchair-friendly universities, but Effie dreams of studying multimedia at Prospect University in New York, "one of the least accessible cities in America." Encouraged by Wilder, her crush and fellow Prospect applicant, Effie determines to prove to herself and to others that she can advocate for her own accommodations by speaking up against school administrators for the right to participate in senior off-campus lunch. But after discovering seemingly insurmountable accessibility barriers on Prospect's campus, Effie and her family must reevaluate how to move forward. Via upbeat and honest prose that eschews didacticism and heavy-handed messaging, Forrest expertly communicates one wheelchair user's challenges of navigating an ableist world. Pitch-perfect rom-com moments bursting with dry humor balance mature reflections on relationships, personal agency, and disability advocacy. Main characters cue as white. Ages 12–up. *Agent: Patricia Nelson, Marsal Lyon Literary. (May)*



### I Kick and I Fly

**Ruchira Gupta.** Scholastic Press, $18.99 (352p) ISBN 978-1-338-82509-1

As a member of Bihar, India's disparaged Nat caste, 14-year-old Heera is subject to the tyrannical Ravi Lala, who rules Heera's neighborhood through fear-mongering and money-lending. If Heera remains in school, however, she can avoid being forced into sex work at Lalten Bazaar, or the Girls Bazaar, to help pay off family debts, like many other girls in her cohort. But when Heera is expelled for defending herself from a bullying classmate, her father prepares to sell Heera to Ravi Lala. That is until Rini Di, a hostel owner and martial artist dedicated to empowering young women, steps in—Rini offers to teach Heera kung fu so she can compete in a tournament for a cash prize, a suggestion to which Heera's parents agree. As Heera betters her fighting skills, she also comes face-to-face with the horrors that girls in her community endure, determining to use her newfound strength to help them. While convenient plotting sometimes requires a suspension of disbelief, debut author Gupta renders Heera's perseverance amid grueling circumstances via straightforward prose and imbues this searing tale with an ominous ambiance that complements its dark themes. Ages 12–up. *(Apr.)*

### Breakup, Makeup

**Stacey Anthony.** Running Press Kids, $18.99 (384p) ISBN 978-0-7624-8163-7

Anthony's layered debut follows 19-year-old transgender nonbinary Eli Peterson as they compete against their ex-boyfriend to win a scholarship to Beyond, an elite special effects and costume design school. The competition, Makeup Wars, requires participants to showcase their makeup skills and cosplaying talent in accordance with varying themes; Eli hopes to use the win to turn their status as a megapopular beauty influencer into a career as an SFX artist. When they learn that their ex-boyfriend, Zachary Miller, will also be participating, longing for Zach—compounded by Eli's belief that the two weren't compatible due to their disparate financial situations—prompts feelings of self-doubt. While managing their lingering love for Zach, Eli also stresses about saving money for top surgery. As the competition grows more heated, Eli must confront their insecurities if they hope to win. Luckily, a cast of intersectionally inclusive friends and rivals support Eli as they work toward overcoming their trauma-informed belief that they have to be "their own safety net" to survive. Anthony's organic descriptions of makeup, cosplay, and convention culture add texture to this inspiring story about self-acceptance and second chances. Most characters cue as white. Ages 13–up. *Agent: Paige Wheeler, CMA. (May)*

### The Cherished

**Patricia Ward.** HarperTeen, $19.99 (336p) ISBN 978-0-063235-11-3

When 16-year-old Jo Lavoie learns that she has inherited her estranged paternal grandmother's estate, Jo's mother and stepfather try persuading her to sell it, especially since the acquisition comes with a bizarre roster of demands ("Don't you dare take this responsibility lightly. Don't think you can sell and walk away.... This house has to stay in the family"). Though Jo decides to keep the property and move in, she quickly realizes that the current tenants Gammy mentioned in her letter seem to be hiding something, and that there's a sinister aura surrounding the backyard shed. As otherworldly and horrifying happenings start occurring at the house, Jo discovers hidden truths that could explain the goings-on of her late father, who experienced schizophrenic hallucinations of the residence before his death. Outmoded descriptions of mental illness—the narrative implies that Gammy being "crazy as a sack of cats" caused Jo's father's schizophrenia—draw attention away from an otherwise solid, eerie premise. Still, Ward (*Skinner Luce*, for adults) wastes little time getting to the meat of this pulse-pounding thriller, pairing brisk pacing with frenetic plotting that adds a layer of unease to Jo's harrowing situation. Most characters cue as white; Jo's father is of Syrian and Italian descent. Ages 13–up. *Agent: Matt Bialer, Sanford J. Greenburger Assoc. (Apr.)*

### The Alchemy of Moonlight

**David Ferraro.** Page Street Kids, $18.99 (384p) ISBN 978-1-64567-972-1

Debut author Ferraro reimagines *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in this ominous supernatural romance. Following his father's death in the summer of 1873, 17-year-old Emile St. Aubert's aunt offers him a choice: marry a woman and continue the St. Aubert line, or be stripped of his inheritance and thrown into an asylum for his attraction to men. Emile instead runs away from home and finds work as a servant for the affluent Montoni household at Chateau le Blanc. As he settles into his new working-class responsibilities, Emile is both thrilled and terrified when he catches the attention of handsome visiting doctor Bram Valancourt. Emile's growing feelings for Bram are complicated, however, when Emile starts developing an attraction to Montoni's nephew, Count Henri Morano. Romance gives way to horror when, after a series of violently dismembered corpses are discovered on the chateau grounds, Emile realizes that something sinister is afoot. Emile's sensitive and thoughtful first-person narration forms the core of this tale, which teems with heart-pounding moments both amorous and frightening. While the central mystery is predictable, Ferraro's handling of coercive power dynamics and conflicting desires, coupled with the intensely raw queer relationships, is fresh and impressive. Emile and Henri cue as white; Bram is Black. Ages 14–up. *Agent: Eva Scalzo, Speilburg Literary. (May)*

### ★ As Long as We're Together

**Brianna Peppins.** Scholastic Press, $19.99 (256p) ISBN 978-1-338-81407-1

Seven Black siblings try to find their new normal after the sudden deaths of their parents in this emotionally devastating novel by Peppins (*Briarcliff Prep*). Sixteen-year-old volleyball star Novah wants to focus on spending time with her friends and earning a sports scholarship, but her responsibilities multiply after her parents are killed in a car accident. To assume guardianship of her siblings and take over the family's pet grooming business, her older sister, Ari, forgoes college, and Novah, as second-eldest, is tasked with caring for the household. But keeping up with her siblings isn't easy; her oldest brother Zion is struggling through a breakup, and her youngest sister Bailey, who is autistic, has stopped speaking entirely. As Novah begins falling behind in school, and her siblings' personal issues threaten to overwhelm, she believes she has no choice but to abandon her dreams to fulfill her parents' "family first" wishes, especially when failure means risking separation. Via Novah and Ari's push-and-pull relationship, complicated by their status as the oldest siblings and de facto caretakers, Peppins crafts a compassionate and complex rendering of a family contending with grief amid myriad interpersonal conflicts that overflows with narrative tension and urgency. Ages 12–up. *Agent: Jas Perry, KT Literary. (May)*

### ★ If Tomorrow Doesn't Come

**Jen St. Jude.** Bloomsbury, $19.99 (416p) ISBN 978-1-5476-1136-2

On the morning that white 19-year-old Avery Byrne intends to take her own life by drowning in the river that winds through her Ivy League college campus, her phone blares with the same urgent message received across the world: a planet-destroying asteroid will strike Earth in nine days. Before she can follow through with her suicide plan, Avery's Indian and Mexican best friend, Cass Joshi-Aguilar, calls to assure her that their recent falling-out is insignificant in light of the impending end of the world. Cass urges Avery to meet her in Boston so the pair can travel to their New Hampshire hometown together. Chapters alternate between the past and the present, as indicated via a countdown toward impact. Past entries depict Avery's struggles with her burgeoning queer identity, as well as her depression and Catholic upbringing, while the present is punctuated by panic, survival efforts, and widespread existential dread. Avery's complicated yet fierce relationship with Cass and the fraught energy between Avery and her parents are rendered in clear and emotive detail, yet most notable is St. Jude's heart-achingly precise interpretation of one teenager's experience with depression and suicidal ideation. Hope for a bright future is always evident in this sometimes dark, thought-provoking debut. Ages 14–up. *(May)*

if tomorrow doesn't come
Jen St. Jude

### Saint Juniper's Folly

**Alex Crespo.** Peachtree Teen, $18.99 (304p) ISBN 978-1-68263-577-3

Two teenagers team up to save a boy trapped in a haunted house in this eerie paranormal mystery, Crespo's debut. After eight years away, a new foster home placement brings 17-year-old Jaime Alvarez-Shephard, who is Mexican American and transgender, back to his quaint hometown of Saint Juniper, Vt. When neighborhood gossip surrounding his past proves too much to bear, he escapes into the nearby woods, called the Folly, where he enters a solitary Victorian house—and is forbidden to leave by the resident ghost. That's where he's found days later by white-cued rising senior Theo Miller, who feels compelled to save Jaime despite his abrasive nature. Theo's desperation leads him to a local occult shop, and Puerto Rican witch Taylor Rivera Bishop, 18, who is eager to carry on her recently deceased mother's magical legacy, despite being prohibited from practicing magic by her grieving father. Friendship grows among the teens as they strive to free Jaime without being implicated for his disappearance. Centering themes of found family and identity, Crespo depicts Theo's unfolding understanding of his sexuality with sensitivity and realism, and his strengthening romance with Jaime sparkles with anticipatory tension and affable banter. Ages 14–up. *Agent: Mary C. Moore, Kimberley Cameron Literary. (May)*

### A Starlet's Secret to a Sensational Afterlife

**Kendall Kulper.** Holiday House, $19.99 (352p) ISBN 978-0-8234-5361-0

A starlet and a stuntman team up to solve a string of Hollywood disappearances in this fiercely feminist speculative caper by Kulper (*Murder for the Modern Girl*). It's 1934, and newly clairvoyant 18-year-old aspiring actor Henrietta Newhouse has just left Chicago for a serendipitous job opportunity in Los Angeles. Elsewhere in L.A., Declan Collins's manager suggests that the 19-year-old abandon stunt work for on-screen acting, lest someone notice his preternatural invincibility. Henny and Declan meet and butt heads during a joint screen test, but their electric chemistry lands Henny a major role with prestigious Silver Wing Studios and Declan a gig as Henny's pretend boyfriend, to help elevate her image. The duo bicker constantly until each learns that the other is secretly investigating why Silver Wing actresses keep vanishing: Declan because he's been hired by a missing girl's family, and Henny because she encountered the ghost of her friend Miriam after the rising star purportedly quit the business and moved back home. Kulper delivers an action-packed mystery replete with witty dialogue and buoyed by an ardent, slow-burn romance that enthralls while spotlighting Hollywood's long history of abusing, commodifying, and discarding women. Most characters cue as white. Ages 14–up. *Agent: Sara Crowe, Pippin Properties. (May)*

### Ab(solutely) Normal: Short Stories That Smash Mental Health Stereotypes

**Edited by Nora Shalaway Carpenter and Rocky Callen.** Candlewick, $24.99 (336p) ISBN 978-1-5362-2414-6

Carpenter (*The Edge of Anything*) and Callen (*A Breath Too Late*) bring together 16 authors including Alechia Dow, Nikki Grimes, Sonia Patel, and more to curate a timely fiction anthology about teens living with mental health challenges. In an opening introduction, the editors state they "wanted readers to receive the unstated message that this representation sends: You can struggle with a serious mental health condition and still live a good and full life." A note from the author follows each entry, and touches on the creator's inspiration for their story and their own experience living with a mental health condition. In James Bird's "River Boy," Hank, an Ojibwe teenager who cries "All. The. Time." befriends his school's troublemaker, who claims that "I'll quit smoking when you quit crying." In his concluding thoughts, Bird posits that "even when feeling different is difficult, you will, as I did... love every moment of it." Covering topics such as anxiety, depression, OCD, PTSD, and PMDD, this sensitive work authentically portrays its teen characters as complex beings whose positive relationships—with friends and family, and with their own mental health—exude hope. Back matter includes resources. Ages 14–up. *(Apr.)*

### ★ Bianca Torre is Afraid of Everything

**Justine Pucella Winans.** Clarion, $19.99 (384p) ISBN 978-0-35872-164-2

Sixteen-year-old white lesbian Bianca Torre thought they had enough on their plate dealing with their "full CVS-receipt-long list of fears," a burgeoning gender identity crisis, and a massive crush on a girl they're too scared to talk to ("Fear #13: Beautiful Women"). But when the death of their conspiracy-obsessed neighbor is ruled a suicide, Bianca feels compelled to add "solve a murder mystery" to their accounting of troubles. Especially because their bird-watching—and people-watching—habit resulted in them being the sole witness to their neighbor's murder by a knife-wielding stranger wearing a beaked plague doctor mask. With the help of their Black best friend Anderson Coleman and their Chinese American crush Elaine Yee, Bianca embarks on an investigation to find the culprit despite "Fear #3: Murder." But as the trio delve further into their inquiry, Bianca must drum up the courage to push past "Fear #26: Dangerous situations in general"—or risk jeopardizing their loved ones. Via Bianca's savvy teenage voice, punctuated by humor both whip-smart and absurdly campy, Winans portrays Bianca's gender exploration and timid steps toward bravery with as much heft as the narrative's deliberately plotted overarching mystery in this exuberant read. Ages 14–up. *Agent: Jordan Hamessley, New Leaf Literary and Media. (Apr.)*

Bianca Torre
IS AFRAID OF
EVERYTHING
JUSTINE PUCELLA WINANS

### ★ Throwback

**Maurene Goo.** Zando Young Readers, $19.99 (368p) ISBN 978-1-63893-020-4

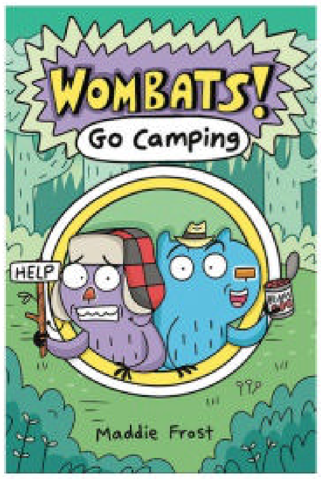
Sixteen-year-old Korean American Samantha Kang must figure out how to return to her own time after a ride-share app inexplicably transports the Gen Z teen to 1995 in this reflective *Back to the Future*–flavored jaunt by Goo (*Somewhere Only We Know*). Student politics in Sam's racially diverse Los Angeles high school are a far cry from what they were when her mother, Priscilla, attended it. Though Priscilla is now a successful lawyer, she spent much of her high school career working long hours at the family dry cleaner while trying to fit in with her popular white classmates. Sam and Priscilla's differing values cause tension between them, and things become further strained when Sam's beloved grandmother, Halmoni—with whom Priscilla has a contentious relationship—falls ill. After an emotional blowout with her mom results in Sam downloading a ride-share app called Throwback Rides, the app sends her back to 1995, where she meets teenage Priscilla. Via sharp-witted humor and multidimensional characters, Goo crafts a layered, intergenerational telling of compassion and empathy that, rather than excusing the actions that drove a wedge between Sam and Priscilla, provides context that helps Sam make peace with their relationship. Ages 14–up. *Agent: Faye Bender, Book Group. (Apr.)*

## Comics

### Go Camping (WOMBATS! #1)

**Maddie Frost.** Viking, $12.99 (96p) ISBN 978-0-593-46529-5

As blue-hued Albert and lavender-tinted Pickles, both wombats, embark on a much-anticipated camping trip, they're shocked to discover that their individual expectations about the event are wildly at odds in this sprightly, chuckle-worthy graphic novel gambol by Frost (*Let's Draw Fun Animals*). While practical Albert arrives prepared for the great outdoors with a tent and a compass, chimerical Pickles—who has grand visions of a cozy fire and refreshing hot tub—is equipped with tons of seemingly useless luggage, such as a jar of dill pickles and a donut floatie. After Pickles stumbles into a nearby creek, the marsupial emerges from the water only to find that a gray baby koala has latched themself onto him. Though Pickles is excited for a new friend, Albert insists they locate the infant's mother, kicking off an adventure through the woods that leads the trio toward myriad situations both exciting and treacherous. Wholesome interactions and lighthearted humor elicit continuous laughter, but the secret sauce is the baby koala, whose huge, endearing eyes and elephant-size ears camouflage their precocious tech acumen. Rather than incite conflict, the best friends' contrasting personalities provide ample opportunities for narrative give-and-take, modeling thoughtful and sincere friendship. Ages 6–9. *(Apr.)*



### The Ancient Underwater City (Peculiar Woods #1)

**Andrés J Colmenares.** Andrews McMeel, $21.99 (160p) ISBN 978-1-524-88491-8; $12.99 paper ISBN 978-1-5248-7929-7

A mysteriously flooded town and inanimate objects suddenly coming to life set the tone for Colmenares's gently eerie graphic novel series opener. Moving can be stressful enough, but for nine-year-old white-cued Iggie, it comes with the added pressure of living with his mother for the first time after being raised by an aunt. Iggie is excited to get to know his mom and explore his new home, but strange challenges present themselves when, on his first night, Iggie notices a flooded town at the edge of the woods; is rescued from a late-night forest excursion by a walking refrigerator; scolded by a yoga-loving chair; and frightened by his blanket, which is carried away in a storm. At school, Iggie confronts bullies, converses with talking chess pieces, and befriends a girl, depicted with brown skin, who keeps a journal filled with unflattering descriptions of her surroundings before a jerky series of events leads Iggie and several animated objects into the woods to uncover the secrets regarding the mysterious flooded town. While the jumbled plot often sacrifices momentum for snappy one-liners, softly rounded illustrations rendered in an autumnal palette depict Iggie's loneliness and struggle to fit in, and personify the objects' bizarre personalities, to deliver a cozy adventure. Ages 7–11. *(May)*

### Grace Needs Space

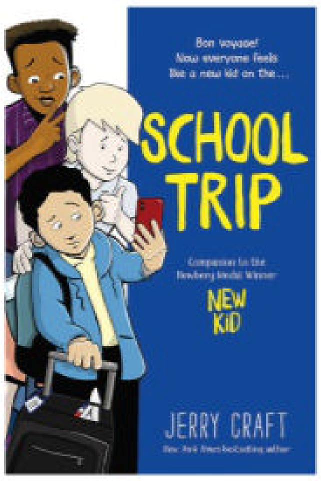
**Benjamin A. Wilgus and Rii Abrego.** Random House Graphic, $21.99 (208p) ISBN 978-0-593-18239-0; $13.99 paper ISBN 978-0-593-18238-3

A 12-year-old discovers that even navigating the vastness of space is not as complicated as maneuvering conflicts surrounding family and friendship in this lushly illustrated adventure graphic novel. Grace, a child of divorced parents, is excited to spend time away from her mother, the chief engineer on Genova Station, with her other mother, Ba, a freighter captain who frequently travels to Titan, one of Saturn's moons. While Grace was expecting to embark on epic adventures with Ba, she finds, instead, that Ba is too busy working to pay her any mind, much like Mom back on Genova. Grace soon befriends a group of students while exploring Titan and accompanies them on educational field trips, but when an incident results in her being left behind during an excursion, she feels as if she's drifting even further from her parents. Through touching and natural-feeling dialogue, portrayed via saturated, full-color illustrations, Wilgus (*Chronin*) and Abrego (*Sprite and the Gardener*) skillfully highlight the enormity of the interstellar setting alongside Grace's intimate personal realizations. Though the story takes place among the cosmos, the earthly truths surrounding love and connection proves artfully rendered. Grace and Mom are depicted with brown skin; Ba has pale skin. Ages 8–12. *Agent: Eddie Schneider, JABberwocky Literary. (Apr.)*

### ★ School Trip

**Jerry Craft.** Quill Tree, $24.99 (256p) ISBN 978-0-06-288554-8; $14.99 paper ISBN 978-0-06-288553-1

In this companion to Newbery winner *New Kid* and its sequel, *Class Act*, eighth grader Jordan Banks is excited about two things: his acceptance letter to the art school of his dreams, and traveling to Paris with his Riverdale Academy Day School classmates. But he's also nervous; going to a new high school means leaving his best friends behind. While he has limited time to accept the new school's offer, Jordan endeavors to disengage from admissions stress by having the time of his life in Paris. As Jordan and his friends prepare to travel abroad, however, they learn that irksome classmate Andy, who's constantly inserting himself into their plans, will also be traveling with them. Despite various setbacks—including teachers' credit cards not working, and Jordan and his friends being tricked into sharing a room with Andy—the group makes the most of what they believe is their last hurrah before going separate ways. With his signature laugh-out-loud storytelling, which teems with nuanced character dynamics, tender moments of acceptance and connection, and a multicultural cast, Craft offers a zestful graphic novel adventure that mixes lighthearted fare with thought-provoking observations on lasting friendship in the face of future-based anxieties. Ages 8–12. *Agent: Judy Hansen, Hansen Literary. (Apr.)* ■


Bon voyage! Now everyone feels like a new kid on the...
SCHOOL TRIP
Companion to the Newbery Medal Winner NEW KID
JERRY CRAFT

# BookLife Reviews

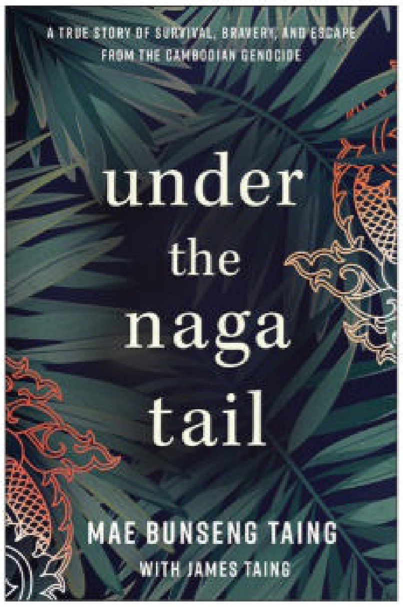
BookLife Reviews are paid reviews of independently published books. Each review contains the honest opinion of a professional *Publishers Weekly* reviewer. A lightning bolt (⚡) indicates an Editor's Pick, a book of outstanding quality.

**MEMOIR**

⚡ EDITOR'S PICK

### Under the Naga Tail: A True Story of Survival, Bravery, and Escape from the Cambodian Genocid

**Mae Bunseng Taing with James Taing** | Greenleaf Book Group Press
352p, hardcover, $26.95, ISBN 979-8-88645-018-7


A TRUE STORY OF SURVIVAL, BRAVERY, AND ESCAPE FROM THE CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE
under the naga tail
MAE BUNSENG TAING
WITH JAMES TAING

This inspiring, harrowing memoir looks back on one man's arduous, and daring, escape from Cambodia and its genocidal Khmer Rouge regime of the 1970s. Written by the escapee Mae Taing himself, in collaboration with his son James, the book starts with a peek at life in pre-Khmer Cambodia, with its idyllic rhythms. But soon, the country is taken over by Khmer soldiers, and Mae and his family are forcefully moved from one labor camp to another. They are subjected to backbreaking labor and inhumane conditions, and even when they manage to escape to Thailand and believe they've seen the last of it, the family is sent back to Cambodia, forced to relive their horror all over again.

"Nowhere on earth, nowhere is there such a place in the world like this," Taing's father laments, and the story is one horror after another: soldiers, jungle, landmines whose detonation Taing describes as "earth … heaving hell." Told with power and clarity in prose touched with hard-won grace, the book is a testament to human perseverance, and will leave you feeling awed, even amazed, at the sheer power of human will and endurance. The storytelling is gripping, stirring great tension, building to bursts of terror. At the same time, *Under the Naga Trail* honors the country and lives that were left behind.

*A heart-rending story of escape and survival under the Khmer Rouge.*

For all the beauty of the prose, the accounts of violence are horrific. Overall, this book takes an unflinching look at the reign of Khmer Rouge–and what it takes to survive humanity's worst—and, eventually, thrive. Lovers of stories of history as it's lived and personal triumph will find this as heartening as it is wrenching.

**Great for fans of**
Heather Allen's *The Girl Who Said Goodbye*, Haing Ngor's *Survival in the Killing Fields.*

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

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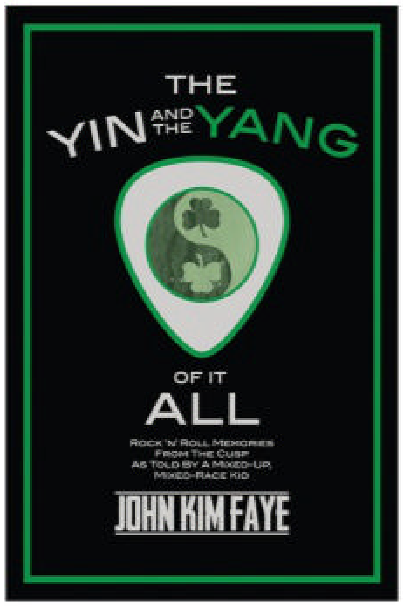
**MEMOIR**

⚡ EDITOR'S PICK

### The Yin and the Yang of It All: Rock'n'Roll Memories from the Cusp as Told by a Mixed-Up, Mixed-Race Kid

**John Kim Faye** | Advantage Books
446p, trade paper, $29.99, ISBN 978-1-642-25743-4


THE YIN AND THE YANG OF IT ALL
ROCK 'N' ROLL MEMORIES FROM THE CUSP AS TOLD BY A MIXED-UP, MIXED-RACE KID
JOHN KIM FAYE

Faye debuts with a high-spirited memoir detailing his time as front man for 1990s alt rock band the Caulfields, alongside a vivid rendering of his lifelong love affair with music: "Music gave me my voice—not just the transmitter of lyrics and melodies from the songs I write but my place in the world, my sense of belonging somewhere and believing in something." The son of a Korean mother and Irish father, Faye candidly shares his struggles with "growing up Asian" as he explores the often opposing forces of his mother's culture, his school experiences, and the ever-present undercurrent of music humming in the background of his life.

In many ways a love letter to his music obsession, this polished memoir will awaken the songbird in readers familiar with '80s vinyl hits and the rising star of punk rock. Faye's first band, No Excuse, found inspiration in artists like MDC and Dead Kennedys, and served as a mouthpiece for his initial attempts at lyrics and later development into lead singer, before reaching a big break in '94 as the Caulfields with A&M Records. Those recollections are consistently entertaining, whether it's their first show with the then-unknown Indigo Girls or being pelted with water bottles.

Faye covers the eventual breakup of the band, too (live on the radio), as well as his solo work, culminating with band IKE. He never shies from the weightier topics, including his divorce and his close relationship with his mother. Rockers and anyone else eager to live a creative life will appreciate Faye's intense passion for song throughout, "the voice that projects the me I want to see in the world."

*A backstage pass to the glory days of alternative rock.*

**Great for fans of** Kim Gordon's *Girl in a Band*, Bob Mehr's *Trouble Boys.*

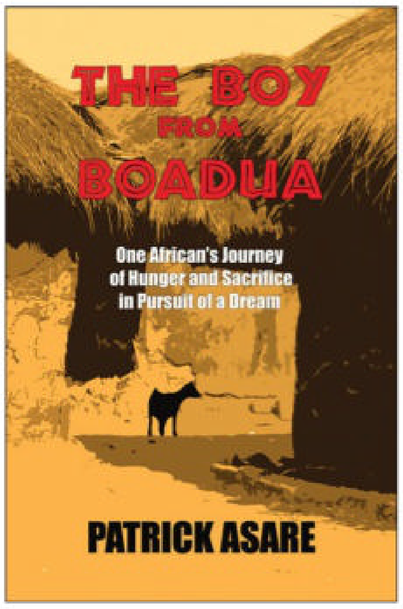
**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

**MEMOIR**

### The Boy from Boadua: One African's Journey of Hunger and Sacrifice in Pursuit of a Dream

**Patrick Asare**

268p, trade paper, $16.95, ISBN 979-8-218-10100-8



Asare's inspirational memoir details his surprising journey from a small village in Ghana to becoming an electrical engineer in the United States, with many unexpected stops along the way. Asare encounters a slew of cultures and experiences, from attending an elite private school in Accra known for having taught Ghana's most influential citizens, to studying electrical engineering in the Soviet Union, to teaching at a public school in the United States. Throughout this odyssey, Asare maintains discipline and perseverance and especially an ethos of "nonstop work," taking great efforts to excel at everything he sets his mind to, from learning English from newspapers to substitute teaching to gain an economic foothold in America. This memoir is a clear-eyed account of the hardships he faced, and lessons he learned.

Right off the bat, Asare throws readers into a compellingly drawn world replete with rampant poverty, hunger, and illiteracy. There is nothing stereotypical about the way Asare portrays the various villages and cities through which his life passes. His account is scattered with piquant, often outright funny, incidents which lend the narrative a buoyancy amid all the strife. A large part of the story involves historical details and incidents that Asare lived through, and to which he offers an insider's perspective. Readers will constantly find themselves amazed at Asare's unflagging persistence in trying to rise up and live the life he envisions for himself.

At times, Asare has a tendency to be a little pedantic, and contemplating life and America and what one ought and ought not do. At other times, the memoir reads slightly like an elaboration of a resume, an extremely impressive one at that. But overall, Asare is clear that he is writing this account to "share some of the valuable lessons he learned" and his sharp, engaging prose will keep readers hooked. Lovers of international stories of perseverance, history, and politics will enjoy this memoir, which is as illuminating as it is inspiring.

*This memoir of leaving Ghana to find success in the U.S. is inspiring, surprising, and well written.*

**Great for fans of**

Krishan K. Bedi's *Engineering a Life*, Ousman Umar's *North to Paradise.*

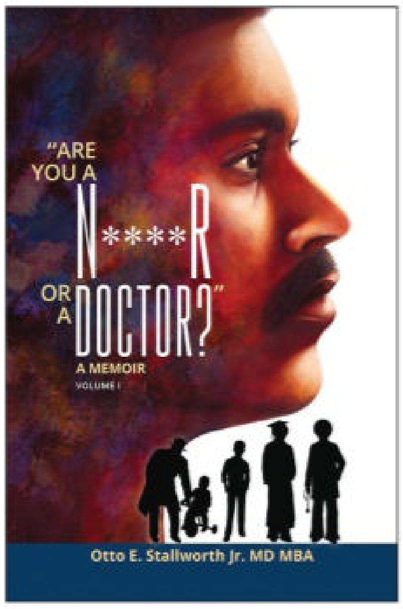
**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A-**

**MEMOIR**

### "Are You a N****r or a Doctor?": A Memoir

**Otto E. Stallworth, Jr.**

290p, e-book, $9.99, ISBN 978-1-667-87111-0



This engaging, memorably told memoir from Stallworth, an anesthesiologist now retired after a 45 year medical career, builds up to the provocative question in its title. It's asked of Stallworth in 1970, by an elderly white patient at Case Western Reserve Hospital in Youngstown, Ohio, where Stallworth, at intern at age 24, was the only Black doctor. Stallworth's response—he essentially says that he's both—may surprise readers. In this instance, he notes, he heard neither "hatred or evil intent," the way he had growing up in Birmingham, when that slur had been hurled "by policemen and by politicians on TV campaigning for mayor or governor." Stallworth saw the man as "a male patient, an elderly male born in another century, in the 1890s"—and saw himself as a doctor. So, he got to work.

Stallworth's memoir abounds in rich, often surprising scenes, some as complex as that one. His lifetime of thinking through these incidents informs every page, starting with his vivid recounting of a 1950s Alabama childhood of ice-cream, marbles, Conkoleen, and questions about the segregated world around him: at a department store, spying an empty lunch counter, he "couldn't help but wonder how White Only food tasted, and why was it White Only?" Arresting portraits of friends, family, teachers, and others bring the era to life, as young Stallworth and his father deliver *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines around the city known as the most segregated in America.

Also arresting are Stallworth's accounts of horseplay at Howard University, of seeing a host of notable entertainers (countless luminaries at the Howard Theatre; a young Richard Pryor; a Gene Krupa show at New York's Cafe Metropole attended by Cassius Clay), of his personal connection to those lost in the 1963 bombing of Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church, and of the time he got lost as a Chicago bus driver with furious passengers. The storytelling is conversational, illuminating, and often funny, as this fiercely independent thinker offers a vital contribution to the historical record.

*The arresting memoir of a Black doctor's journey and 1950s Alabama upbringing.*

**Great for fans of**

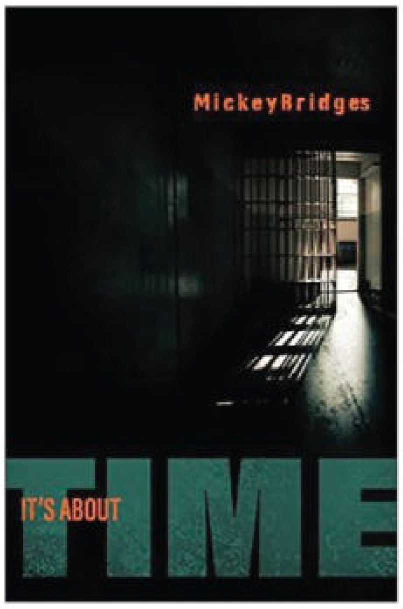
Charles M. Blow's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, Damon Tweedy's *Black Man in a White Coat.*

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **B**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **B+**

**MEMOIR**

## It's About Time

**Mickey Bridges** | BookBaby
200p, e-book, $14.91, ISBN 978-0-578-38767-3



This frank, often raw memoir from Bridges, a musician and counselor, charts with rare candor a childhood descent into drugs and crime. Growing up in the Compton neighborhood of Los Angeles in the 1950s and '60s, Bridges loved playing saxophone and helping out his parents at their record store, but trouble was never far away—in fact, his father, "a natural born hustler," ran a gambling parlor in the back room of the shop. Bridges links his own acting out to his parents' painful breakup. He relished few things more than riding around with a friend, "listening to jazz music on the radio and getting high on weed." He experimented with sex early—adventures recounted in unflinching scenes that can be hard to read—and at age 16 ran away from the McCobb Home for Boys when he learned of his girlfriend's pregnancy.

By 25, he was serving time in federal prison on drug-related charges. He sold and indulged in increasingly potent narcotics in Compton, of course, but also San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury and Chicago's Old Town. The list of his products and addictions suggests a shorthand history of the era's American counterculture: marijuana, hallucinogens—he saw Jimi Hendrix at Monterey while on acid—but also, inevitably, heroin and cocaine, which he took intravenously. *It's About Time* documents the gangs and distributors of these drugs, the culture around them, the impossibility of getting straight without help. When he fled to the Air Force, hoping for a path out, he was quickly discharged for the drugs in his blood rather than helped.

The memoir opens and closes with impassioned thanks to God for helping the older Bridges get back on the path, and there's inspirational power in the story of how he won early release through a program designed to help incarcerated people complete four year degrees. More insight into that experience and his life after would have been welcome, though the storytelling here has weight.

*This vivid memoir digs deep into a troubled Compton upbringing.*

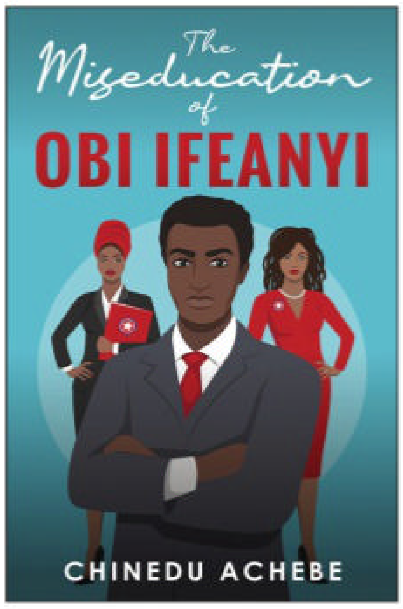
**Great for fans of** Lynne Isbell, Rebecca Pantaleon, Bonita Bradshaw's *Black, Brown, and White,* Kevin Lewis's *Born and Raised in the Streets of Compton*.

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **A**

**FICTION**

## The Miseducation of Obi Ifeanyi

**Chinedu Achebe** | CreateSpace
226p, trade, $16, ISBN 978-1-975-78414-0



Achebe's character-driven novel of life, love, tradition, and secrets among Nigerian Americans examines the life of Obi Ifeanyi, who lives in Houston with his wife, Nkechi, and toddler son, Ikechukwu. Set in the runup to Obama's 2012 re-election, *The Miseducation of Obi Ifeanyi* finds Obi, despite having a graduate degree in law from Howard University, struggling to make ends meet. Obi's close-knit extended family gathers for frequent get-togethers and pitches in with help and support. As her own graduation approaches, Nkechi joins Folosade "Sade" Olufemi's campaign for city council without knowing a truth that Obi would like to keep hidden: that Sade and Obi were once together. Tension in Obi's household waxes and wanes when Obi's traditional upbringing and notions of gender roles clash with Nkechi's more liberal ideas.

Achebe's language is straightforward and matter-of-fact and his characters varied, distinct, and interesting as they navigate American life and the complexities of the novel's political moment. ("They are giving Obama all these problems because he is black," Auntie Nkiru opines, in a spirited discussion of why so many Americans resist the administration's plan to make health insurance more accessible.) Nkechi and Ijeoma, strong women in their own ways, especially stand out. The author delineates the aspirations and problems faced by African Americans along the path to career success. The novel also dramatizes the clash in value systems between the more traditional and patriarchal Nigerian culture of first generation immigrants and the ideas of people born and raised in America.

Scenes are alive with talk of the characters' experiences and opinion, though their voices sound similar, and the dialogue often lacks the verve and spontaneity of the spoken word. Still, the novel succeeds both as an arresting slice-of-life story and as an engaging portrait of the culture clashes and everyday challenges faced by the Nigerian American community.

*An engaging slice-of-life of a Nigerian American family and community during the Obama years.*

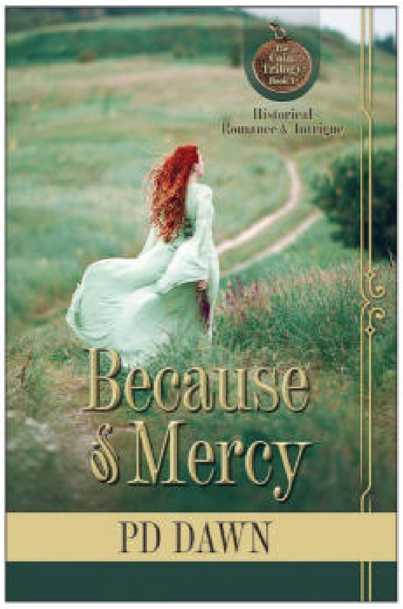
**Great for fans of** Lizzie Damilola Blackburn's *Yinka, Where Is Your Huzband?*, Akwaeke Emezi's *You Made a Fool of Death With Your Beauty.*

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

## Because of Mercy

**PD Dawn** | PDDawn Writer
286p, e-book, $30, ISBN 978-0-473-56532-9



This enjoyable first entry in Dawn's Coin Trilogy finds Rose Mounce, the spirited daughter of a dairy farmer in New Zealand, navigating her future amidst fears of becoming a spinster. At 18, Rose has received no marriage proposals, despite her wish to fall in love and start a family. She's as fiery as her red hair—with a penchant for reading dime store westerns—and spends her time riding horses across her father's land. When she suffers a riding accident breaking in a new gelding, Rose's future changes in an instant—and leaves her harboring a dark secret that could ruin her chances of marriage.

Dawn's novel is the epitome of feel-good romance, with troubled knight-in-shining-armor Henry, who falls for Rose when he rescues her from the accident, proposing marriage after the two become steadfast friends. But when the first World War strikes, Henry heeds the call of battle and enlists to prove his mettle. That understandable conflict starts a downward spiral for both Henry and Rose, with their relationship suffering as the world burns. When Henry's wounded and meets a pretty Scottish nurse on the front, he puts Rose—and his life as he knew it before the war—out of his mind. Readers will empathize with Henry, surrounded by death in the trenches, and also with Rose, who, when Henry asks to be released from their engagement, is once again staring spinsterhood in the face, but this time with a broken heart. Added to the mix is Henry's sister, Molly, who's holding a grudge against Rose and determined to do whatever it takes to keep them apart.

Despondent about her future, Rose finds solace in her Christian beliefs, as Henry fights his own demons, eventually turning to God for answers as well. The ending is a sweet surprise and sets up the series for more satisfying romance in the future. Fans of satisfying love stories will be rewarded.

*A soon-to-be spinster finds and maybe loses romance in this feel-good World War I story.*

**Great for fans of** Hallee Bridgeman's *Honor Bound*, Elsie Davis's *The Heart of a Cowboy.*

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A-**

FICTION

## Blue Billy's Rogue Lexicon

**David Lawrence** | Broadbound Publishing
258p, e-book, $5.99, ISBN 978-1-7377233-4-9

Blue Billy's Rogue Lexicon
DAVID LAWRENCE

This evocative historical novel of rogues, sex, and found community from Lawrence (*Hugh*) finds young William "Billy" Dempsey, in London, 1771, cast aside by the Marquess of Argyll, a nobleman who had kept him in luxury as his live-in lover. Blue Billy—his moniker among sex workers—has no choice but to return to his former place of employment, a male brothel in a squalid area of the city. When he was just 13, Billy's mother sold him into prostitution to Marathon Moll, who auctioned off his virginity to the highest bidder. Although Billy thought he'd secured a more comfortable life beyond Moll's, the seedy brothel now is his last resort. His penchant for stealing makes Moll reluctant to welcome him back, until the house's rising star, Sukey Chandler, befriends him. A string of adventures leads Billy to two men offering different futures and the possibility of departing the bawdy life on his own terms.

What the novel lacks in plot it makes up for in racy humor, rich atmosphere, and vivid characterization. Scenes like a staged "marriage" at Moll's are uproarious, and the brothel offers a heartening sense of connection and camaraderie. Lawrence draws a sharp contrast, though, with life outside it, as Billy's London is a foreboding place full of thieves and vagrants speaking a street dialect called "cat language," one of many striking details that bring the milieu to life.

Charming and sympathetic, Billy aims to rise above his origins in poverty, and Lawrence showcases his bold steps to do so in brisk, witty prose. Other characters also engage: Sukey, an aspiring stage actor who also yearns for a better life, makes a grand sidekick, while a rugged carpenter and a dapper "Beggar Extraordinaire" round out the cast as Billy's competing love interests. The brothel setting might lead some readers to expect graphic sex, but Billy's story veers more toward light historical romance.

*A racy charmer finds a young man in Georgian London seeking a fresh start at a bawdy house.*

**Great for fans of** K.J. Charles, Mackenzi Lee.

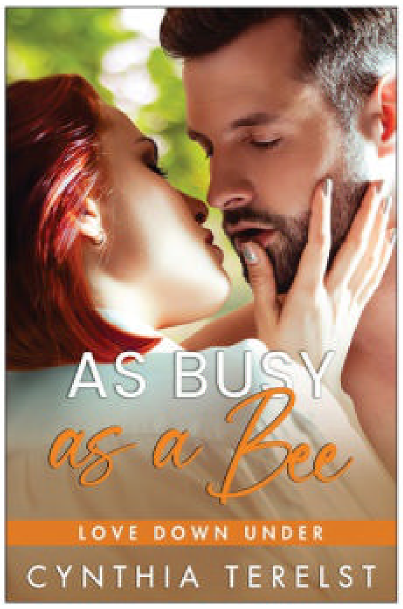
**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: A | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **A**

ROMANCE

### As Busy as a Bee: Love Down Under

**Cynthia Terelst**

290p, e-book, $3.99, ASIN B09QXF7Z36



This charming installment of Terelst's Love Down Under series introduces 26 year-old Beau Hart as he returns home from California to work on his family's apple orchard in Tasmania just in time for picking season. He's been away eight years, and news of his return comes as a surprise to his family—and especially to his childhood friend, Clare, a "senior" on the farm and Beau's first love. Still holding on to anger and resentment for his leaving and shutting her out so many years ago, Clare welcomes him with anger and avoidance. This all changes when they are forced to share an office and work closely together. Uncertain about her future at the Hart farm and feelings for Beau, a cat-and-mouse romance unfolds from both perspectives as the two heal scars from the past and make plans for the farm's future.

The story is fast-paced and heartfelt as Beau struggles with clinical anxiety and confidence while trying to reintegrate himself back into the family business and regain Clare's trust. Terelst writes movingly of how each lead is the other's "sense of calm" but also creates a convincing feeling of uncertainty about the relationship, adding welcome tension. Clare does her best to keep distance between them, but seeing the dynamic between Beau and his parents stirs old memories to the surface and softens her resolve.

Terelst has written a slow burn full of romantic tension and a cast of beautifully flawed characters, all set against the backdrop of beehives, orchards, and heirloom apples. Fans of character-driven, second chance romances with realistic love interests will find this an enjoyable read. Although there is some mild to moderate heat, Beau and Clare's unique friendship and supportive grandparents give the story a sweet, cozy feel. This heart-warming demonstrates shows the importance of showing loved ones trust and appreciation.

*A charming second-chance romance set against the backdrop of a Tasmanian apple orchard.*

**Great for fans of**
Kimberly Krey's Second Chances series, Jennifer Griffith's *Forgotten First Kiss.*

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A-**

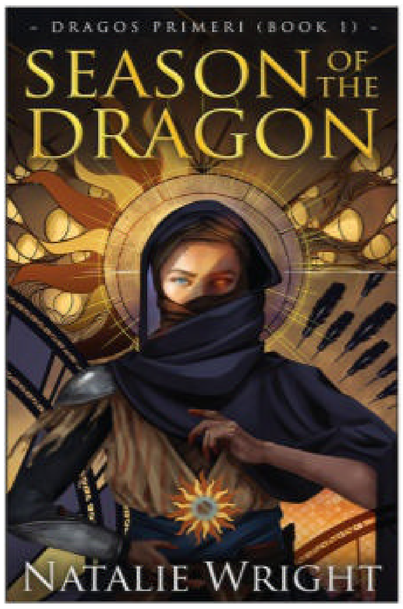
SF/FANTASY/HORROR

EDITOR'S PICK

### Season of the Dragon: Dragos Primeri, Book 1

**Natalie Wright** | Menaris Books

482p, trade paper, $22.95, ISBN 979-8-987-49121-8



This dazzling fantasy series starter from Wright (the H.A.L.F. series, among other titles) seizes attention from the start, balancing bravura worldbuilding with compelling characters, urgent storytelling, and a welcome sense of clarity. The abundant original creatures, lands, clans, and more are not just quickly defined but woven into scenes and thoughts so readers understand immediately how they matter. But in this polished first volume that richness of invention doesn't slow momentum, as Wright's story takes flight. As she nears adulthood, young Quen of the Pijwar herdclan feels she must escape "the agitated quiver of her shadow heart," that is the second self that she was born with—and that sets her apart. After a tragedy, Quen's accused of being a "slint," a fearsome shadow creature reputed to steal children.

Terrified that she may be becoming just that, and warned by a secret-holding, wolf-riding traveler that tragedy will follow her, Quen faces the terrors of a dusty land and its trickster spirits in her quest first to find the truth about her shadow self—and, eventually, to hunt a terrifying beast that has brought devastation to her people. (Expect a touch of romance, too.) *Season of the Dragon* expertly blends classic quest and self-discovery narratives with fresh details that immerse readers in its world: the link between desert winds and the breath of the god Juka; the smartly developed elemental "Corner" theology of Indrasi; systems of learning like the Pillars.

But it's the people that drive this story, orienting readers in this strange land with its twin-souled protagonist, giving reasons to cheer and cower as Quen and the cohort she gains face dangers like the dragons of the title, imported (like yindrils and other magical creatures) by the abusive ruling Kovan Dynasty. The stakes are high, the prose crisp, and the adventure thrilling as Wright rewards and upends reader expectations, building to an epic ending that satisfies even as it sets up more adventure.

*This dazzling epic fantasy series kickoff rewards and upends reader expectations.*

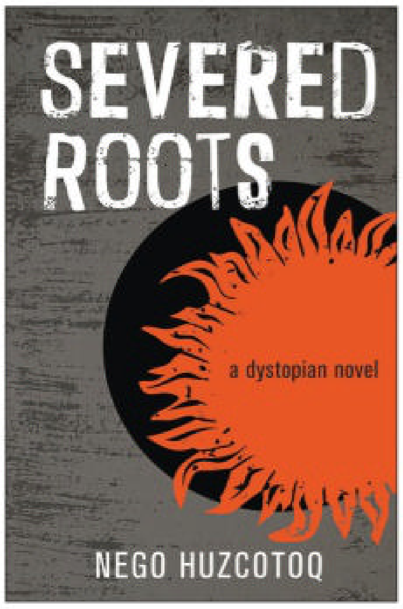
**Great for fans of** Glenda Larke's Watergivers series, Tasha Suri's *Empire of Sand.*

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

## Severed Roots: A Dystopian Novel

**Nego Huzcotoq** | Paper Spider
306p, trade paper, $16, ISBN 978-1-7386781-0-5



Huzcotoq's provocative dystopian sci-fi debut is *The Handmaid's Tale* in reverse, told from the perspective of a man, or "mankey," who functions as a second-class citizen in a totalitarian regime run by women where heterosexuality, motherhood, and marriage are illegal. Nick Wong is a gentle, inquisitive rule-following Canadian who has a part-time job as a magician and a few flimsy friendships, but his whole life changes once his friend Beatrice tells him her plans to self-immolate because she can't be a mother. With the help of his enlightened male friend Morrie, Nick does everything he can to give Beatrice that opportunity, regardless of the risk to himself.

"The Movement" as it's dubbed, is a result "of an entire species frustrated with the intractable problem of men—what to do with them, how to tame them, how to prevent them from destroying the world," but in pursuit of this effort, the powers that be put policies in place that prove Orwellian in their degree of inhumanity, like injecting all men with a chemical that erases their sex drive. While the world-building and plot are compelling, the characters come off as somewhat flat, and the dialogue can be occasionally sterile. Still, *Severed Roots* qualifies as a page-turner, building to some surprises with crisp, polished prose.

The novel's certain to upset and unsettle, both in its narrative and its depiction of women as oppressors. Memorable dystopian literature reflects back to readers their own reality and throws it into question, and Huzcotoq draws links to fourth-wave feminism, fascism, and the understandable fear that men are on-track to destroy the planet. Contemporary readers don't have to fear women with power to relate to lines such as "We're turtles. All of us… withdrawing into our shells while the world runs amok," and the novel is shrewd enough not to ask readers to presume the worst of contemporary feminists, as it asks, "Didn't every movement in history aim to create heaven on earth? And didn't every movement fail?"

*This provocative novel imagines a future ruled by women, and a man who must break the rules.*

**Great for fans of** N. Lee Wood's *Master of None*, Christina Dalcher's *Femlandia*.

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A-**

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

## Runeheart

**Gino Marchetti**
375p, trade paper, $14.99, ISBN 979-8-986-89271-9

Marchetti's polished debut offers a werewolf story rich with magic, folk horror, unexpected hospitality, and themes of what one owes to one's found pack. Rune Corinsson lives a quiet life amongst his band of wolves, isolated from civilization, striving to maintain balance between his human half and the beast that wants out. One night a brutal snowstorm and an ill patriarch brings the Harvaldssons—a family of 12—to his door. Though he's reserved due to his distrust of people and his own secrets, Rune invites the family into his home and tends to Harvald, the father, who is suffering from lockjaw due to tetanus in his foot. Rune begins to connect with each family member. When a decree is set forth by the king that everyone must leave the area due to war, Rune faces a difficult choice: risk letting the family travel alone, or join as their protector—when he might be a danger himself.

Despite the threat of Rune's wolf-self, *Runeheart* proves as emotional as it is suspenseful, as Marchetti deftly builds tension among the many characters, first due to the forced proximity of Rune and the Harvaldssons, hunkered down in close quarters, and then as they face the grueling natural elements. Marchetti's depiction of a werewolf has teeth, but it's ultimately humane, a mature treatment that finds fresh angles.

Sharp and distinct character development, a sure hand at evocative description, and a fast-moving plot line will rivet readers interested in serious treatment of lycanthropy and questions of guilt and redemption. The novel's long, but it's often urgent. Here's a wolf tale that gets caught up in the heat of blood but also takes seriously the weight of killing. The novel's highlight isn't its crisp action—it's the confession that follows when someone close to Rune asks the hardest of questions, "How do you live knowin' the truth 'bout what you are?"

*A superior werewolf story, with moral weight and serious teeth.*

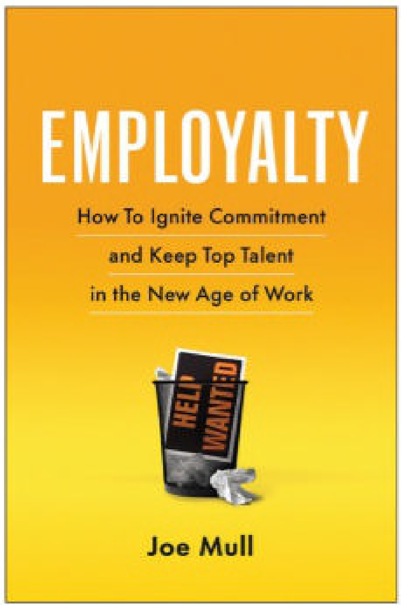
**Great for fans of** Elodie Harper's *The Wolf Den*, Glen Duncan.

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

BUSINESS & PERSONAL FINANCE

### Employalty: How to Ignite Commitment and Keep Top Talent in the New Age of Work

**Joe Mull** | Page Two Books, Inc.
176p, trade paper, $19.95, ISBN 978-1-774-58290-9


EMPLOYALTY
How To Ignite Commitment and Keep Top Talent in the New Age of Work
HELP WANTED
Joe Mull

"I became convinced: the world needs a one-sentence answer to the question 'Where does commitment come from at work?'" That pressing inquiry sparked the idea and the writing process of *Employalty*, a compact but incisive employer resource examining what it takes to create a workplace that employees never want to leave. Arguing that employers must now create the best job for the person, and paying special consideration to the shift in workplace standards and the way employees report to work since the pandemic, Mull (*No More Team Drama*) lays out a clear, concise program for employers to bolster employee satisfaction—and retention rates—across the board.

Mull's "Employalty" builds on three concepts any employee will toast: offering an "Ideal Job" with "Meaningful Work" and a "Great Boss," ideas that Mull breaks down in crucial detail while pointing the way toward creating them. From this foundation Mull offers a framework to revamp any business's workplace environment and employee expectations, including tools like a scorecard crafted to guide readers toward the best accommodations for any and all employees. Touching on employee burnout and "The Great Resignation," Mull shares clarifying research throughout on the ways in which employee/employer relations are changing and evolving—and the benefits of being forward thinking. A host of quotes, diagrams, and anecdotes showcase the Employalty framework in action, with real-world examples showcasing the power of employee satisfaction through wages, flexible work schedules, manageable workloads, competent leaders, and more.

*This management guide urges businesses to make jobs flexible, desirable, and worth committing to.*

The result is a gently provocative resource, written with warmth and crisp clarity but not shying away from hard truths. This guide will be a welcome resource to businesses looking to improve employee satisfaction and decrease employee turnover. All of the steps to cultivate loyal and dedicated employees are within the pages of this book.

**Great for fans of** Leigh Branham's *The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave*, Thomas Erikson's *Surrounded by Idiots*.

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

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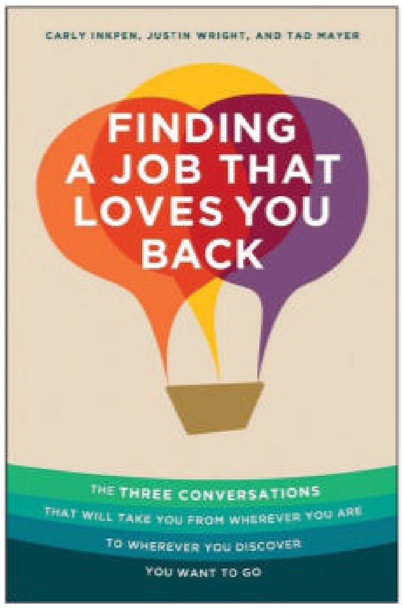
SELF-HELP

EDITOR'S PICK

### Finding a Job That Loves You Back

**Carly Inkpen, Justin Wright, and Tad Mayer** | Habitus Incorporated
280p, mass market, $17.97, ISBN 9781737946908


CARLY INKPEN, JUSTIN WRIGHT, AND TAD MAYER
FINDING A JOB THAT LOVES YOU BACK
THE THREE CONVERSATIONS THAT WILL TAKE YOU FROM WHEREVER YOU ARE TO WHEREVER YOU DISCOVER YOU WANT TO GO

This conversational yet extensive career-coaching guide lays out a flexible framework to aid readers in finding the perfect job, one suited to an individual's lifestyle and goals while offering happiness and a sense of fulfillment. In clear, informative detail, Inkpen, Wright, and Mayer present strategies—such as serious self examination about one's true goals, and exploratory discussions with "connectors" and "decision makers" to help prepare for and target a job search—with the goal of improving the ways people go about landing not just an individual position but building a satisfying career path.

Throughout, they emphasize the urgency of feeling confident about the next step, offering warm guidance, inspiring anecdotes, and easy-to-follow exercises and examples to help readers who "need to change something about your career but [are] not sure what exactly to do next." This resourceful guide's four phases demonstrate how to discover what one truly wants in a job, how to gain meaningful access to the field one wants to work in, how to be effective in pursuing a specific desirable position, and how to feel certain that the job will prove fulfilling. Writing with the clear-eyed but encouraging tone of supportive coaches, the authors offer a host of practical tips for surveying and entering a field, while pushing readers to identify their needs and aspirations—and how to make themselves candidates that the people with the power to make changes will say yes to.

This book is a vital resource for anyone just entering into the workforce, or readers who find themselves unhappy with their current employment and ready to dare to strive for more. The authors are frank about facing the risk of making a change and offer pointers about making "modest investments" in career growth, getting the most out of networking conversations, acquiring "access capital," and—crucially—crafting proposals that decision makers won't be able to resist. All that demands understanding both your self and your field. The authors point the way.

*An informative guide on job searching, networking, and ensuring a position is the right fit.*

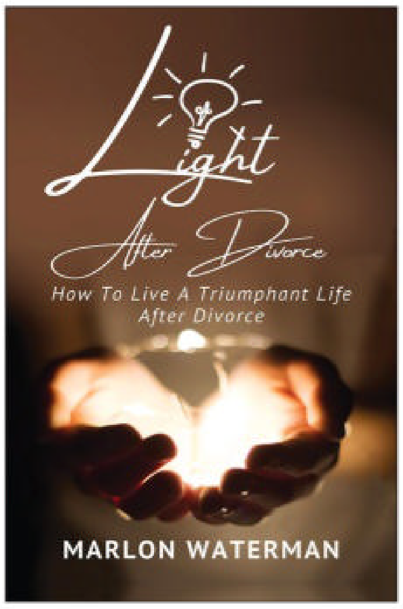
**Great for fans of** Carson Tate's *Own it. Love it. Make it Work.*, Aliza Knox and Wendy Paris's *Don't Quit Your Day Job.*

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

**SELF-HELP, RELATIONSHIPS**

### Light After Divorce: How to Live a Triumphnat Life After Divorce

**Marlon Waterman** | Pocketbook Publishing Corporation
101p, e-book, $14.95, ISBN 979-8-986-87820-1



This compact, upbeat guide from Waterman (author of the devotional *Be The Light*) offers an encouraging look at how to let go, "clean the clutter," and move on after divorce, with special emphasis on handling emotions and grief over the loss of a marriage and its promise of forever. Waterman frankly recounts his own experiences and feelings after a divorce, sharing ways he worked anguish and anger with therapy and self-reflection, especially the work it takes to face guilt and resentment, to learn to better communicate, to find the "bright side" in the failed relationship, and eventually to establish "a clean slate concerning the most valuable relationship of all, the SELF." Living up to its title, *Light After Divorce* acknowledges the pain it takes to achieve that—but also the urgency of learning to love and trust again.

Each conversational chapter of this self-help guide shares insightful ways to reflect, grow, and heal, and Waterman poses in-depth questions at the end of each for readers to apply to themselves and their own lives. Touching on themes such as self-care, accountability, and growth, Waterman showcases the challenges that individuals face as they try to move past the hurt involved with divorce, plus opportunities to learn and grow from the experience, especially with regard to future relationships. (The distinction between "chemistry" and "compatibility" is key.) The prose is simple but easy to follow, with personal anecdotes that will resonate with readers, and much informative and motivational material.

A quick read with practical advice for those going through a divorce or break-up, or looking for guidance on managing and navigating long-term committed relationships, *Light After Divorce* offers tips and insights that can be applied to any marriage or relationship that needs improvement—and a friendly reminder that it's never too late to grow and become better in love.

*An upbeat self-help book showcasing how to grow, heal, and move on after divorce.*

**Great for fans of** Louise L. Hay and David Kessler's *You Can Heal Your Heart*, Heidi Priebe's *This is Me Letting You Go*.

**PRODUCTION GRADES:**
Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **A**

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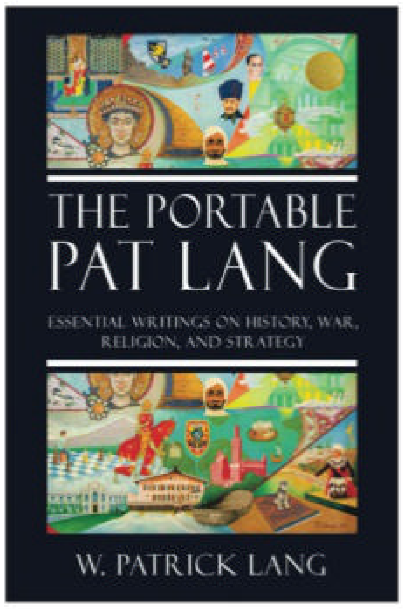
**HISTORY & MILITARY**

### The Portable Pat Lang: Essential Writings on History, War, Religion, and Strategy

**W. Patrick Lang** | Iuniverse
302p, trade paper, $20.99, ISBN 978-1-6632-4842-8



It's a sign of humility that this illuminating collection from Lang, an Army colonel and retired head of the Defense Intelligence Agency's global human intelligence service, isn't titled *I Told You So*. In the many clear-eyed essays and other writings within, Lang surveys the U.S.'s 21st century intelligence gathering and military strategy, often stating, in pieces from the early 2000s, hard truths about Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Middle Eastern countries that would be borne out over long, painful years. Today these warnings that weren't heeded offer an urgent reminder of what went wrong.

Lang demonstrates his independence, boldness, and acute understanding from the start, with a 2002 piece declaring the CIA's National Intelligence Estimate covering Iraq's capacity for weapons of mass destruction "the worst constructed, most illogical and indeed dishonest document of its kind that I have ever seen." Weight of evidence justifies the heated tone, as Lang breaks down, in that essay and others, the intrusion of bureaucrats and politicians into the ways that intelligence is "collected, collated, analyzed, and disseminated." As he considers the nation's mistakes and misapprehensions in the face of terrorism and counterinsurgency, Lang writes with clarity and insight ("To be blunt, our foreign policy tends to be predicated on the notion that everyone wants to be an American"), drawing on a host of historical examples, lessons from his own career, and deep knowledge about the Middle East and Islam.

"The Al-Qaeda that most Americans imagine does not exist," Lang writes in a 2006 essay worth celebrating for its prescience. Elsewhere, he sounds the alarm not only that the U.S. couldn't succeed in Afghanistan but that even defining a "win" was impossible. In speeches, book reviews, proposals, and other forms, Lang writes with inviting prose and rare persuasive power, for an audience of intelligence and military experts and strategists but also lay readers. Engaging short fictions set in other eras round out the collection.

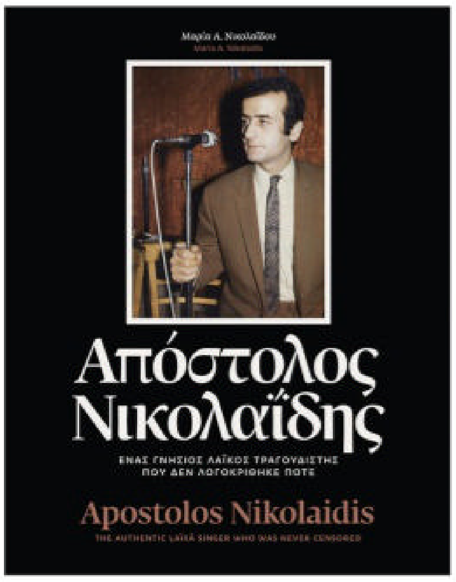
*Prescient, clear-eyed essays about what could—and often did—go wrong for the U.S. in the Middle East.*

**Great for fans of** Richard H. Shultz's *Transforming US Intelligence for Irregular War*, Thomas E. Ricks's *Fiasco*.

**PRODUCTION GRADES:**
Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

**POP CULTURE**

### Apostolos Nikolaidis: The Authentic Laïká Singer Who Was Never Censored



**Maria A. Nikolaidis** | Marilou Press, LLC
508p, trade paper, $49.95, ISBN 978-057-89441-4-2

The daughter of the beloved Greek musician Apostolos Nikolaidis has assembled this mixed-media celebration of her father's life and career in this handsome book, an act of love and memory bursting with personal photos, revealing anecdotes, an extensive biographical timeline, and impassioned tributes to his talent and courage. From a young age Nikolaidis, born in 1938, loved singing and knew he wanted to be an entertainer. Following the laïká singer's first professional appearance, at the Athens club Triana in 1959, to his record deal with Columbia Records and his voyage from Greece to the United States, and on into a career of consequence, this in-depth study offers firsthand accounts from friends, family, journalists, and the singer himself, as much of the narrative chronicled in this work is written in first-person perspective.

It reveals a life full of love, family, performing, and bravery, as the virtuosic Nikolaidis dared in the 1970s to record the traditional rebetika songs banned by the military junta then ruling Greece. Fans will be engrossed with Nikolaidis's humble childhood, his time in the Army in Thebes, and the duration of his musical career. With text presented in both Greek and English, this is both a biography and a keepsake, a scrapbook filled with revelatory ephemera, press clippings, incisive passages written by friends ("First off and above all, he was a benevolent soul who had no cunning and malevolence in him") and journalists, and brisk paragraphs laying out the highlights of Nikolaidis's life.

This up-close look at that life will prove an inspiring and entertaining read for fans, an introduction for those new to him, and a valuable source for researchers and musicologists. The translations, photos, and short-form passages offer a richly detailed vision of Nikolaidis, while the text is direct and to-the-point, dedicated to essences. It's a collage and highlight reel in book form, honoring the author's father's art and legacy.

*An entertaining mixed-media celebration of an epochal Greek musician.*

**Great for fans of** Gail Holst's *Road to Rembetika*, David Prudhomme's *Rebetiko.*

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

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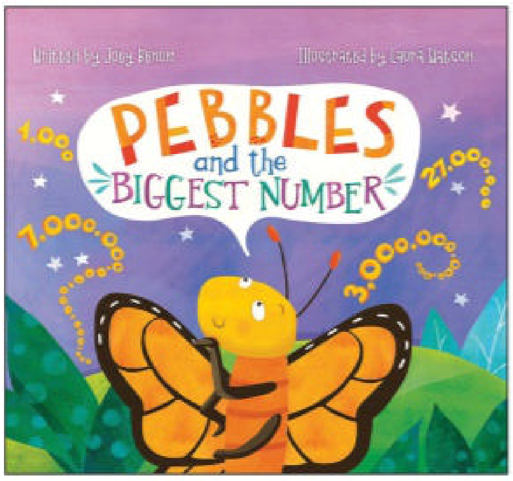
**PICTURE BOOK**

EDITOR'S PICK

### Pebbles and the Biggest Number



**Joey Benun** | The Biggest Number, LLC
48p, hardcover, $17.99, ISBN 978-1-737-81860-1

Pebbles the butterfly loves to count the flowers in his garden, but when he gets tired of the same small numbers, he goes on a quest to find and learn the biggest number that he can. Flying through varied ecosystems (desert, ocean, tundra) and meeting all kinds of animals (camel, alligator, frog, human), Pebbles takes young readers on a mathematical and scientific learning journey. Featuring informational asides and vibrant digital illustrations, *Pebbles and the Biggest Number* is an engaging read centered on numerical concepts and animal facts, a journey that's sure to intrigue even reluctant learners.

The choice to make a bright-eyed, smiling butterfly the protagonist and narrator welcomes kids in with a friendly face on an insect they're likely familiar with, immediately establishing comfort. That inviting feel helps when taking on something as complex as numerical concepts—the ones touched on here include infinity. Each layout tells the story with a striking encounter between Pebbles and other creatures, illustrated with warmth, joy, and amusing faces by Laura Watson. Each scene also offers multiple additional elements to take in, usually worked into the background environment, featuring either science or math facts. These are written concisely and clearly, offering real-world examples to aid readers in grasping the concepts ("Some ants can lift 50 times their body weight. That's like you lifting a car!").

Written in a conversational but still informative tone, the book succeeds at providing a multitude of opportunities to incorporate math concepts into daily life, as well as interesting animal facts. Backmatter includes a "dig deeper" section for both words and numbers found throughout the text. The numerical dig deeper section uses sand to illustrate the enormity of the numbers discussed. Fantastic as both an introduction or teaching tool for large number concepts, *Pebbles and the Biggest Number* is an excellent addition to any STEM bookshelf.

*Potential scientists and mathematicians will love following Pebbles's journey to find the biggest number.*

**Great for fans of** Emily Gravett's *The Rabbit Problem*, Asia Citro's *Pigeon Math.*

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy:A

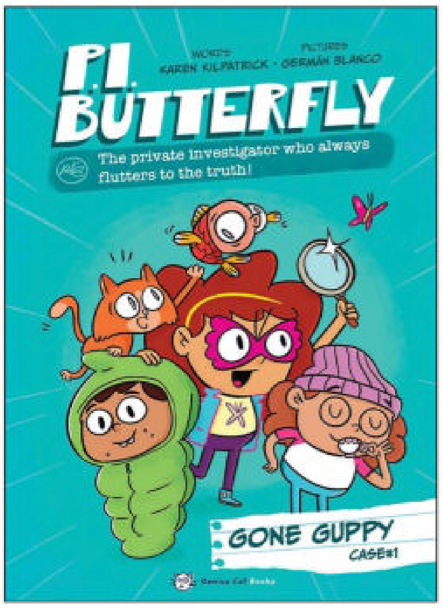
**MIDDLE GRADE, COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS**

EDITOR'S PICK

## P.I. Butterfly: Gone Guppy

**Karen Kilpatrick** | Genius Cat Books

128p, $10.99, trade paper, ISBN 978-1-938-44746-4


WORDS KAREN KILPATRICK · PICTURES GERMÁN BLANCO
P.I. BUTTERFLY
The private investigator who always flutters to the truth!
GONE GUPPY
CASE#1
Genius Cat Books

Every superhero has a backstory, and the intrepid protagonist in Kilpatrick's lively and hilarious graphic novel is no exception. Our young hero first decides to don her pink mask and start solving mysteries, we learn, five years back, when a butterfly led her to her missing doll, which had been stolen by a neighborhood dog. She's been a self-proclaimed private investigator ever since, and is eager to leap into action to take on this series starter's urgent main case: little sister Quinn's pet fish has gone missing. P.I. Butterfly observes the clues, interviews the suspects, and considers the evidence before she tracks down Mili's amusing whereabouts.

For kids as well as adults, much of this book is laugh-out-loud funny. When making her suspects list, P.I. estimates her mom's age at 100 and considers the possibility that her mother, likely sick of cleaning the tank when the kids failed to live up to their promise to do it themselves, might have gotten up early and eaten the fish like sushi. The resolution, too, is a delight, as are the odd, kid-brained details of this detective's business: P.I. accepts payments like candy and butterfly larva. Helpfully, certain detective-story terms are defined for curious kids—perimeter, alibi, toxic agent—offering a chance to learn among the laughs.

Germán Blanco's bright, bold art shows red-haired, wide-eyed P.I. sleuthing with her magnifying glass poised and ready and her orange Alfredo by her side, the panel-to-panel storytelling clear, inventive, and always funny. Cute ideas like P.I.'s outlandish imaginings of what might have happened to the fish—her mom dissolving the evidence in a barrel of toxic sludge, for instance—become full LOLs in Blanco's rendering. A bonus: after cracking her case, P.I. offers tips on becoming a detective, which will inspire kids to search for and solve mysteries of their own.

*This laugh-out-loud graphic novel finds a butterfly-loving P.I. on the case of a missing guppy.*

**Great for fans of** Dan & Jason's *Barb: The Last Berzerker*, Roger Langridge's *Abigail and the Snowman.*

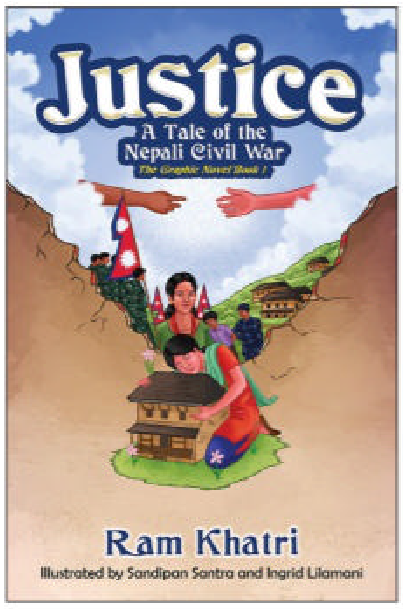
**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A**
Editing: A | Marketing copy: **A**

**MIDDLE GRADE, COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS**

## Justice: A Tale of the Nepali Civil War

**Ram Khatri** | Restart Publishing, LLC

88p, trade paper, $15.99, ISBN 978-1-737-75522-7


Justice
A Tale of the Nepali Civil War
The Graphic Novel Book 1
Ram Khatri
Illustrated by Sandipan Santra and Ingrid Lilamani

"It was a simple life; a peaceful life," narrator Tara muses in Khatri's pained, humane graphic novel. "At least that's what I thought in my childhood innocence." *Justice* chronicles, from young Tara's perspective, the end of that innocence, which comes to her Nepali family farm in the form of war. First, in the early 2000s, her nation is torn between Maoist revolutionaries and government forces, with her father increasingly pressured to take a side. As neighbors turn on each other, and young people are hauled away to fight, Tara's parents attempt to persevere without involving themselves. But soon soldiers are searching their home as the children hide in the barn, and when the worst happens Tara blames herself.

The storytelling in *Justice* is tense and heartfelt, the shadows gathering over a sunny childhood. Dialogue is spare, just enough to tell the story and reveal the characters, but it's the art—created, in the book's first half by Sandipan Santra and in its second by Ingrid Lilamani—that pierces the heart. Santra's depiction of Tara's childhood captures an idyll going wrong, with characters' fears plain on their faces as they hear alarming radio reports or deal with men of uncertain allegiances and motivations. Occasional static panels, repeating what we've already seen but with a minor change, are especially powerful: an empty bed, a barn door opening, signs the world is coming to the farm.

Lilamani's section, meanwhile, offers a bold stylistic choice, presenting Tara's wrenching further adventures in black-and-white. Santra's earlier scenes are in color, tinged at times with a haziness appropriate to memories, while Tara's Nepal looks drained, the faces harsher, land and sky stripped of possibility. (The panels burst with fascinating detail, though.) Here Tara is bereft and growing up, searching for her missing brother. The story ends on a cliffhanger, before readers will be ready to let these characters go, but the journey to it is memorable.

*The piercing story of a young woman split from her family during Nepal's civil war.*

**Great for fans of** Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi*, Morten Dürr's *Zenobia.*

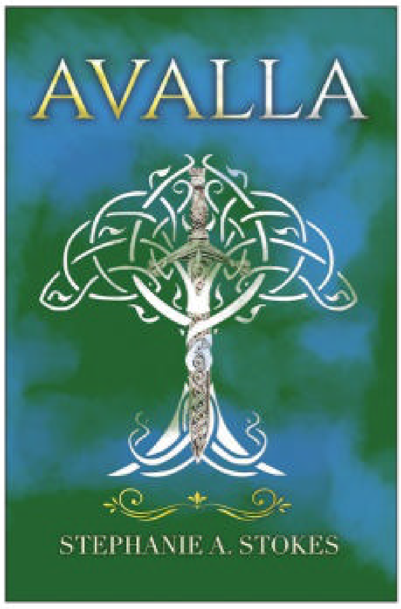
**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A**
Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **B**

**YOUNG ADULT**

### Avalla

**Stephanie A. Stokes**

421p, e-book, $4.99, ASIN B09SC2T3SQ



This ambitious fantasy from Stokes finds contemporary relevance in a sacred empire in decline, its foundations riven by greed and corruption, as a young woman, a disciple of the Priesthood, discovers that those with power are changing not just the law to benefit them but systems of belief—and what's taught to disciples like herself. After a bright, inquisitive student is seemingly murdered, young Audra and several of her disciple friends suss out a possible wide-ranging conspiracy to limit the people's knowledge of their rights, to reward those already wealthy, and to give total power to one of the local kings. More shocking still are betrayals among Audra's cohort, and a plot to give an authority figure control over Audra's most intimate power of all.

Stokes blends the epic and magic-school genres of fantasy with a chilling dash of the dystopian, capturing the early days of a "new society," the jolting realization that the institutions one believes in have rotted, and the bold young women who recognize what's coming and take steps to face it. The thoughtful but quick-paced story that follows will find Audra assuming an urgent leadership role, besting men in combat, experimenting in romance with a War Duke she at first takes for a fool, and eventually uncovering and facing an antagonist who's willing to murder and torture in the name of power.

Adding to the novel's resonance is the choice to set it in a continent that's not fully settled by the prevailing powers, with mysterious "raiders" from the wild attacking civilization—and creating a pretext for the plotters' limiting of freedoms. The dialogue tends toward the formal, action sometimes is wordy, and readers may wonder at some quite-earthly proper nouns: Merlin Arthur, Princess Cathy. For all the political and theological wrangling, though, Stokes pens a lively story of adventure, visions, surprises, and a young woman's maturation, all building to a satisfying ending.

*This inventive epic fantasy blends a coming-of-age with the dystopian.*

**Great for fans of**

Victoria Aveyard's Red Queen series, Pierce Brown.

**PRODUCTION GRADES:** Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–**
Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **B**

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*"For me, interviewing clients is just the start.
I internalize their voice, how they talk, and the words they use."*

# Ghostwriting 101

## A successful coauthor lays out the keys to a strong book partnership

By Linda Kulman

I once published an article under my byline that a ghostwriting client read. "I really liked it," she said, "but it didn't sound like you at all." No, I thought. It didn't sound like *you* at all!

Because I have collaborated on a dozen books, I carry a lot of voices in my head. Many people believe ghostwriting is stenography. The "author" talks, the ghostwriter types, and voila! A book is born.

That's not how it works. In the best collaborations, the client opens up about failure and answers the most personal and mundane questions, like, "What office equipment did you use in 1973?" They inherently understand that it might take being asked something multiple times to get to the nub.

But a good ghostwriter has to be ready for the unpredictable. Taking on a book project is like buying a house without an inspection: you know you'll later discover a faulty wire, a leaky pipe, or a damp patch in the basement—you just don't know which it will be, or at what point.

When I signed on to my most recent ghosting gig, *Up Close and All In: Life Lessons from a Wall Street Warrior*, a memoir with former Morgan Stanley CEO John Mack, I braced myself for him to be, well, scary. The nickname he earned during 40-plus years on Wall Street was Mack the Knife, and I was the fourth ghostwriter he had hired for this project.

The unexpected element surfaced on the day we began. I suggested a plan of action, and his response caught me off guard. "You're the expert," he said in his North Carolina twang that reminds me of a banjo. "I'm in your hands."

The man who hung up on the U.S. Treasury secretary, the Federal Reserve chief, and the president of the New York Federal Reserve during the 2008 financial crisis clearly knew what he knew—and knew what he didn't know. Banking was his bailiwick. Writing was mine.

For me, interviewing clients is just the start. I internalize their voice, how they talk, and the words they use. I immersed myself in John's world to put readers on the trading floor, in board meetings, and at conference tables with powerful clients around the globe. I don't have a background in finance, and because *Up Close and All In* was aimed at a general readership, not just at Wall Street veterans, this gave me an edge. I described the financial realm with fascinated eyes. My daily reading became the *Financial Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Bloomberg*, and I acquired a library of business tomes.

Besides talking extensively to John and Christy, his wife of 50 years, I conducted 95 interviews. John's cousins told the story of his mother. Born in Lebanon and a dynamic entrepreneur, she made the same remark every time she stood over the stove stirring a pot: "Best I ever cooked." The flight attendant who flew with him during the financial crisis recounted how John, usually a gregarious gin rummy fiend, declined to play cards on one trip, instead withdrawing into himself. Former Duke men's basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski pointed me to John's interest in military history. I walked around Manhattan, past Morgan Stanley's headquarters, past the apartment building where John lived in 1968. I flew with John and Christy to Mooresville, N.C., to see his childhood home.

All of this led to a successful partnership. We finished on time, the book made the *Wall Street Journal* bestseller list, and the reviews were uniformly outstanding, including one from this magazine. We also became friends and continue to chat often.

Across my ghosting career, I've found that most people are too busy to pause and figure out the themes of their lives. It's my job to capture the complexities and nuances of human experience in a way that rings true to the subject and the reader.

I love what I do. Ghostwriting allows me to live multiple lives. I have adopted the personae of professional athletes, politicians, a first lady, the wrongly incarcerated, statesmen, entrepreneurs, conservationists, and financial titans. I relish the intellectual challenge of taking someone's story, laying down the foundation, constructing the scaffolding of the themes, and burnishing the narrative with telling details and suspense.

I started out in journalism. One frustration in that field is that you never have enough time to break through the surface because you have to move on to the next article. Working with someone for a year, seeing the elementary school playground where they got into a fight, visiting the ice cream shop they worked in as a teenager—it all allows me to go deeper, to truly grasp who my client is and to capture the mark they've made on the world.

This makes what I do a privilege. ■

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*Linda Kulman is a bestselling ghostwriter and author.*

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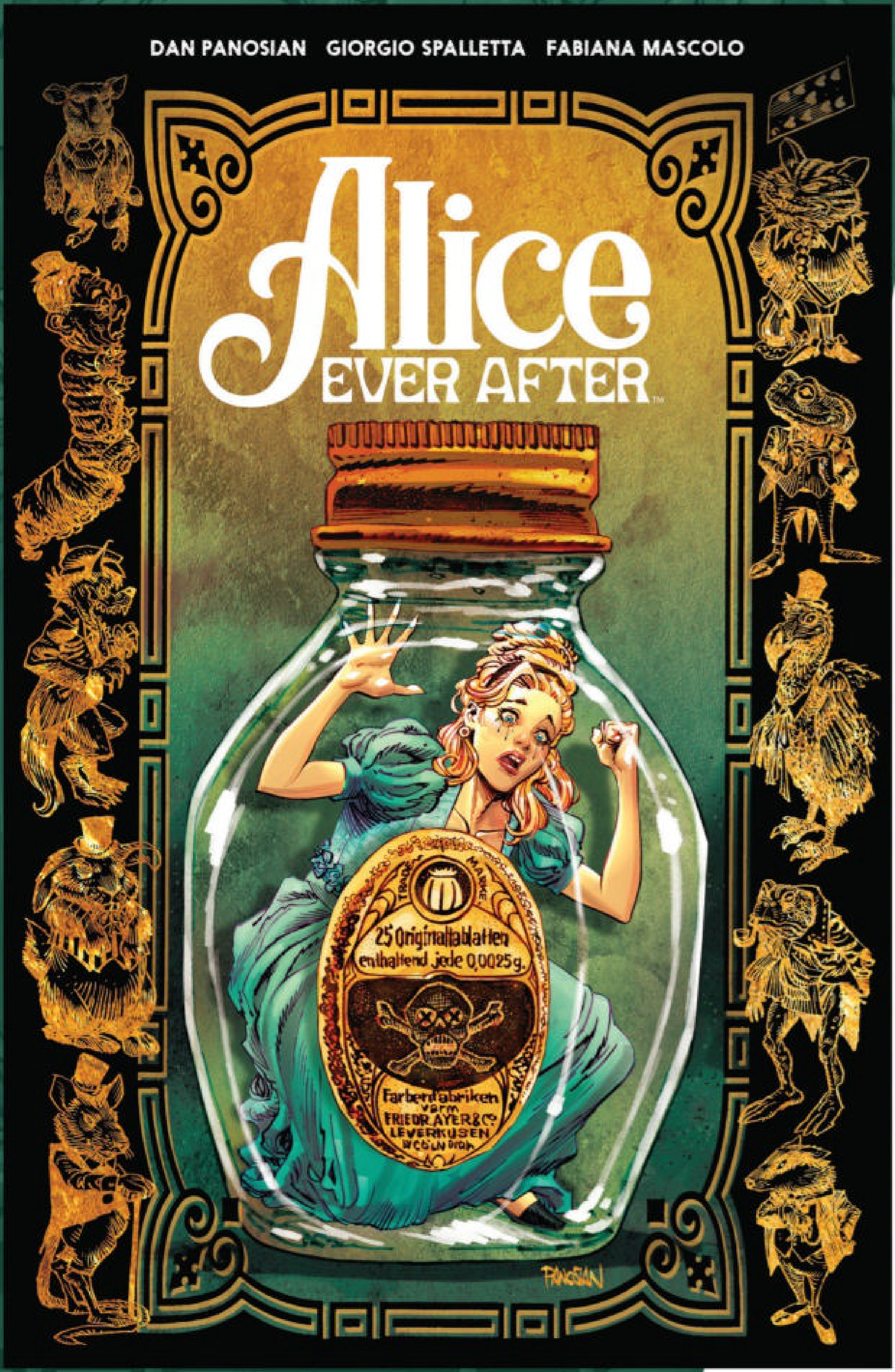

**Return to Wonderland in this dark sequel by superstar artist and writer**

## DAN PANOSIAN

*(An Unkindness of Ravens, Canary)*

**and artist**

## GIORGIO SPALLETTA

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- Author featured as a Keynote Speaker at LibraryCon Live
- Virtual interviews with creators hosted on social media channels

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